

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S TACTICS IN SYRIA: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN
SHIFTING A PEACEFUL ARAB SPRING INTO TERRORISM

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General Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S TACTICS IN SYRIA: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHIFTING A PEACEFUL ARAB SPRING INTO TERRORISM, by Major Hasan Harkous, 137 pages.

The present descriptive study examines the Islamic State's (IS) use of social media to launch its message and expand its propaganda to the world. IS focus on the Syrian Arab Spring revolution that started on March 15, 2011, as a foundation of tacit and explicit support of some Syrian people to evolve into a reorganized terrorist group. Examination and analysis of articles, reports, magazines, IS's publications and social media posts (such as those found on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook) constitute the main methods of research for this report to deduce how IS expanded its social media organizational capabilities between 2011 and 2014. The study incorporates a mixed method approach consisting of both archival and statistical research. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively by using the document review method. The inductive approach used to analyze the data was the Framework Analysis using scientific theories to validate the effectiveness of the research questions. Research findings from social media suggest that IS is a sophisticated organization driven by religious and political ideas to create an Islamic Caliphate. IS uses social media as a primary means of information dissemination, making the distribution of its media decentralized. One of the limitations of this study is the danger of virus and malware attacks from terrorists that make researchers increase their investigations.

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ACRONYMS

AAS	Ansar al-Sharia
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DAIISH	Al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham
ERN	Euphrates Revolution Network
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IS	The Islamic State
ISI	The Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JN	Jabhat al-Nusra
JTWJ	Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad
LCC	Local Coordinating Committee
SMN	Social media networks

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1838, Sidney Morse wrote to his brother Samuel to congratulate him on the recent unveiling of the telegraph, which Sidney called “not only the greatest invention of this age, but the greatest invention of any age.” He prophesied, “The surface of the earth will be networked with wire, and every wire will be a nerve. The earth will become a huge animal with ten million hands, and in every hand a pen to record whatever the directing soul may dictate!”

— Emerson T. Brooking and P. W. Singer, *The Atlantic*

Background

“As-Shaab Yoreed Eskaat el Nizam” which means, “The people want to topple the regime” was the slogan of the peaceful revolutionaries across the Middle East during the 2011 Arab Spring.¹ On March 15, 2011 in Syria, two hundred people gathered in Damascus and peacefully demanded the removal of Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria – activists on Facebook called it the ‘Day of Rage’, but the protest remained peaceful.² Tension between protesters and Syrian security forces increased and became more violent through the remainder of March.

In Syria, the Arab Spring began in March 2011, when a group of Syrian children, ages nine to fifteen years old, was arrested in Daraa for painting revolutionary slogans and anti-regime graffiti, on their school walls. The children viewed these slogans on

¹ Huge Macleod, “Syria: How it all began,” *PRI*, April 23, 2011, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2011-04-23/syria-how-it-all-began>.

² Elizabeth Folck, “Syria revolution: Arevolt brews against Bashar al-Assad’s regime,” *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2011, accessed October 29, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/post/syria-revolution-revolt-against-bashar-al--assads-regime/2011/03/15/ABrwnEX_blog.html.

satellite television and included “The people want to topple the regime”; “Your turn is coming, Doctor”; and “Leave.”³ However, the children also wrote their names on the walls along with the graffiti, which expedited their arrest by Syrian intelligence agents.⁴ The regime security forces detained, interrogated, and tortured the boys. Ten days after their arrest and detention and following Friday prayer, the people of Daraa gathered together in a peaceful protest demanding the release of the boys. The protestors chanted “silmiya” (peaceful) and “hurriya” (freedom).⁵ When the children were released, their bodies and faces showed signs of severe torture; some had burns and others had had their fingernails pulled out.⁶ The cruel treatment of the young boys enraged Syrian people throughout the country. These were the same people that the Syrian regime had oppressed for decades.⁷ The condition of the boys upon return and the circumstances surrounding the incident solidified the discontent within the Syrian population that resulted in the

³ Amal Hanano, “The Syrian School Boys Who Sparked a Revolution,” *The National*, March 30, 2012, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/the-syrian-schoolboys-who-sparked-a-revolution>.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Crimes Against Humanity in Daraa,” June 1, 2011, accessed March 25, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/01/syria-crimes-against-humanity-daraa>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Asaad Al-Saleh and Loren White, “Dissecting an Evolving Conflict: The Syrian Uprising and the Future of the Country,” Institute for Social Policy and Understanding and the New American, June 2013, accessed January 12, 2017, http://mob11.all4syria.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ISPU_Dissecting_an_Evolving_Conflict.pdf.

⁷ Farzaneh Roudi, “Youth Population and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Opportunity Or Challenge?” Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Secretariat New York, July 22, 2011, accessed January 16, 2017, http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/egm-adolescents/p06_roudi.pdf.

‘Friday of Dignity.’ This wave of protests spread throughout Syria, reaching Homs, known as the “Revolution capital city.”⁸ In Daraa, the people protested, calling for the end to the Syrian government. However, Syrian security forces immediately repressed this peaceful display of dissent. The security forces fired into the crowds of protestors, killing dozens of people and injuring others.⁹

The protests continued into April. The Syrian security forces increasingly used violence to subdue the people and the suppression methods became more severe. Daraa experienced its bloodiest day on April 22 when security forces killed 72 protesters. Then on April 25, 2011, the Syrian Army laid siege to the town of Daraa since many of the dead were in the southern village of Ezra, near Daraa and in a suburb of Damascus.¹⁰ The siege lasted eleven days and resulted in 220 civilian deaths.¹¹ As a result of the Syrian security force continued brutality, the once peaceful protesters became armed rebels embroiled in a violent civil war with the Syrian regime. It was within this tumultuous environment that jihadist and Islamist groups, who believed in al-Qaeda (AQ) ideology and had an established network in the Damascus countryside, Homs, and Aleppo, seized

⁸ Ahmed Shehabat, “The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011,” *Global Media Journal: Australian Edition* 6, no. 2 (2012): 1-9, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.hca.westernsydney.edu.au/gmjau/archive/v6_2012_2/ahmad_shehabat%20_RA.html.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Anthony Shadid, “Syria Escalates Crackdown as Tanks Go to Restive City,” *The New York Times*, April 25, 2011, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/4/26/world/middleeast/26syria.html>.

¹¹ Souria Houria, “The Syrian Human Rights Organization (SAWASIAH),” April 27, 2011, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://souriahouria.com/the-syrian-organization-for-human-rights-swasiah-statement/>.

an opportunity to form the Islamic State and establish the ‘Caliphate’ in Bilad al-Sham—the Levant.¹²

The eruption of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 provided an opportunity for Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) to establish a safe haven in Syria for operations in Iraq.¹³ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the ISI, authorized Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, a Syrian and al-Qaeda in Iraq militant, to begin a new subdivision of AQ in Syria. In August 2011, al-Joulani and a group of prominent AQ operatives crossed the border from Iraq into Syria. Al-Baghdadi sent this group, armed with the plans and funding needed to have a safe haven in Syria, to meet with pre-existing extreme Islamists in northeastern Raqqa, Aleppo, Hasakah, and Azaz.¹⁴ Together, they formed Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) in October 2011.¹⁵ This new AQ affiliate in Syria was domestically focused. Its objectives were to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime and protect the Sunni population within Syria.¹⁶ By January 2013, al-Nusra was a challenging force with resilient popular support in

¹² Noman Benotman and Roisin Blake, “Jabhat al-Nusra li-ahl al-Sham min Mujahedi al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad: A Strategic Briefing,” Quilliam Foundation, January 8, 2013, accessed October 29, 2016, <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf>.

¹³ Aaron Zelin, “Al-Qaeda Announces an Islamic State in Syria,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 9, 2013, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-announces-an-islamic-state-in-syria>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Quilliam Foundation, “Jabhat al-Nusra a Strategic Briefing,” January 8, 2013, accessed September 22, 2016, <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Syria. Al-Nusra continued to grow in strength of fighters, weaponry, and financial funding from Arab countries to defeat the Syrian regime.¹⁷

JN featured entirely different approaches from ISI in Syria. According to ISI commanders, JN's factions violated some religious commitments or Sharia laws in the controlled areas. This made a rift between ISI and JN commanders. On April 8, 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released a recorded audio message on the Internet. He announced that JN was merging with ISI to become the "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham" (ISIL), under his command.¹⁸ The next day al-Joulani rejected the merger and affirmed the group's allegiance to AQ and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹⁹ Al-Nusra then split into two groups. Some members, particularly foreign fighters, followed al-Baghdadi's edict and joined ISIL, while others stayed loyal to al-Joulani.²⁰

In June 2013, *Al Jazeera Site* reported that it had obtained a letter written by AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to both Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Mohammad al-Joulani rejecting the merger of the two organizations. He also appointed an emissary to oversee

¹⁷ Rania Abouzeid, "The Jihad Next Door," *Politico Magazine*, June 23, 2014, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/al-qaeda-iraq-syria-108214>.

¹⁸ The Middle East Media Research Institute, "ISI Confirms That Jabhat Al-Nusra Is Its Extension In Syria, Declares 'Islamic State Of Iraq And Al-Sham' As New Name of Merged Group," April 8, 2013, accessed January 21, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/>.

¹⁹ Abouzeid, "The Jihad Next Door."

²⁰ Richard Spencer, "Syria: Jabhat al-Nusra split after leader's pledge of support for al-Qaeda," *The Telegraph*, May 21, 2013, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10067318/Syria-Jabhat-al-Nusra-split-after-leaders-pledge-of-support-for-al-Qaeda.html>.

relations between them and put an end to tensions.²¹ Later in the month, al-Baghdadi released an audio message in which he rejected al-Zawahiri's ruling and declared that the merger of the two organizations into the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was going ahead. This sequence of events caused much confusion and division among members of al-Nusra.²² In November 2013, Al-Zawahiri ordered the disbandment of ISIL and said al-Nusra should be considered the *only* AQ branch in Syria.²³ He bestowed the title “Tanzim Qa'edat Al-Jihad fi Bilad Al-Sham”²⁴ to al-Nusra, officially integrating it into AQ's global network.²⁵ On June 29, 2014, and despite al-Zawahiri's announcement in late 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced his new title as “the Caliph” for the newly established Islamic State (IS), which extended from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq.²⁶

²¹ Basma Atassi, “Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger,” *Al Jazeera*, June 9, 2013, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013699425657882.html>.

²² Al Jazeera, “Iraqi al-Qaeda chief rejects Zawahiri orders,” June 15, 2013, accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013615172217827810.html>.

²³ The Daily Star, “Zawahiri disbands main Qaeda faction in Syria,” November 8, 2013, accessed January 2, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Nov-08/237219-zawahiri-disbands-main-qaeda-faction-in-syria-jazeera.ashx>.

²⁴ Translation of “the Qae'dat Al-Jihad organization in the Levant.”

²⁵ R. Green, “Al-Qaeda Upgrades Its Presence in Syria,” The Middle East Media Research Institute, November 25, 2013, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/al-qaeda-upgrades-its-presence-syria>.

²⁶ Cameron Glenn, “Timeline: Rise and Spread of the Islamic State,” Wilson Center, July 5, 2016, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-rise-and-spread-the-islamic-state>.

By 2014, the aims of IS in Syria were to incorporate the numerous current jihadists groups into one overarching entity. The first aim provides coherence to action in emphasizing on the Islamist nature of the conflict. The second aim was to assemble a military capacity for the group, such as collecting weapons and training recruits. IS needed to achieve both goals in order to build an Islamist State in Syria and establish the ‘Caliphate.’²⁷

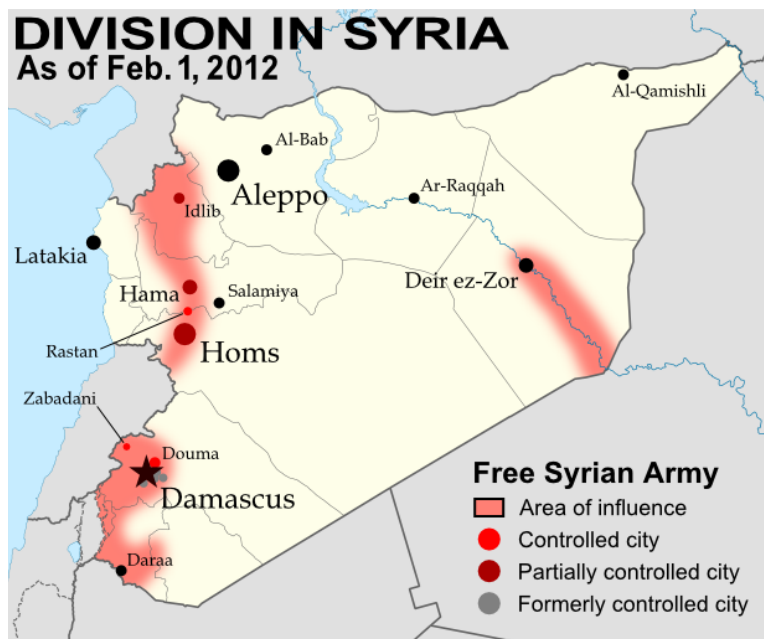


Figure 1. Active regions in Syria by the uprising forces as of February 1, 2012

Source: Crescent Shift, “Active Regions in Syria,” accessed October 22, 2016, <https://crescentshift.wordpress.com/page/7/>.

²⁷ Benotman and Blake, “Jabhat al-Nusra li-ahl al-Sham min Mujahedi al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad: A Strategic Briefing.”

In Syria, the defectors from the Syrian Army, who named themselves the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA), collaborated with the Syrian Islamists, and JN. The alliance grew and by January 2012, many rural areas and provincial towns fell to them as shown in Figure 1. Between January 2012 and June 2014, IS garnered support from the Syrian Islamists, defectors from the FSA, JN, and a number of Syrian protestors with its message and propaganda to create an Islamic State in Syria. In June 2014, IS spokesman “declared these captive territories an ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and demanded all Muslims declare obedience to its leader.”²⁸ Moreover, IS had global influence through its social media platforms. Its messages had resonated some of the extreme Jihadists around the world. As a result, IS recruited more individuals from a wider range of nationalities than any previous terrorist group like AQ. Despite its international ambitions and apparent breadth, IS is failing to create a viable Caliphate. IS-controlled areas in Iraq and Syria are decreasing because of the coalition led by the US forces who are striking them and eliminating IS’s abilities and capabilities to control the land. As this pressure grows, IS is likely to attempt further attacks outside its territories, promoting its global reach thus shifting media focus from its increasing loss of land to global outreach.²⁹

²⁸ Richard Spencer, “Isis declares its captive territories an 'Islamic Caliphate',” *The Telegraph*, June 29, 2014, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/10934427/Isis-declares-its-captive-territories-an-Islamic-Caliphate.html>.

²⁹ Anne Barker, “How Islamic State's impact has gone global,” *ABC News*, March 23, 2016, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-16/islamic-state-isis-global-impact/7089664>.

Introduction to the Study

This research will examine IS's use of social media to gain support from within the Syrian public during the 2011 Arab Spring. The public revolt in Syria followed other such revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. However, unlike these countries, the Syrian revolution evolved into a civil war that provided a suitable environment for IS to increase its support base. This descriptive study seeks to determine how IS used social media to exploit this emergent opportunity within Syria.

Scope

This study depicts the rise of the Syrian Arab Spring in 2011 and how IS used social media to capture the attention of people and found a place for itself from which it could start to grow in Syria between 2011 and 2014. The challenge in this study is to collect extensive information about IS use of social media and have a clear understanding of its effects.

Importance of the Study

The importance of the present study lies both in its theoretical and practical significance. With regard to theory, the findings of this research will add to the existing body of literature. The importance of media literacy, fighting terrorism, oppression, and the double-edge use of social media illustrates the practical significance. There is an urgent need for governments to curb the negative effects of social media and know how to utilize it, and to find effective ways to combat terrorists that are using social media as a weapon. Extremists of different sects are increasingly using social media to recruit,

radicalize, and raise funds. IS is one of the most competent experts of this approach.³⁰ Social media has become a means by which IS can increase both its support base, and the likelihood that an Islamic Caliphate is possible. Social media is an ideal propaganda platform that might launch a misinformation campaign. As such, it is critical to understand how terrorist groups like IS use social media, because it is the new domain within modern theaters of global war. Moreover, IS is an active threat to Lebanon, the country of the author which is a part of the Levant. Lebanon shares most of its border with strife-ridden Syria.³¹ Lebanon, with the population of 4 million, currently provides sanctuary to 1.5 million Syrian refugees, which is more than any other nation in the world.³² Right now, one in three residents in Lebanon is a refugee. In 2014, IS invaded a village at the western border of Syria known as Aarsal, and it captured Lebanese Army

³⁰ J. M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>.

³¹ Janis Powers, "Why Lebanon May be ISIS's Next Target," *The World Post*, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/janis-powers/lebanon-isis_b_8078784.html.

³² Sally Hayden, "Syrian refugees in Lebanon find relative safety but little security," *The Irish Times*, February 4, 2017, accessed March 31, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-find-relative-safety-but-little-security-1.2962479>.

soldiers.³³ IS executed a number of suicide bombs attacking the Lebanese Army and the Shiite populated areas in Lebanon who support the Syrian regime.³⁴

Research Questions

How did IS use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to radicalize peaceful protestors during Syria's Arab Spring in 2011 and create a foundation of tacit and explicit support that enabled them to evolve into a viable terrorist group that had global aspirations? The guiding sub-questions include:

1. What social media capabilities did the Islamic State develop and use between 2011 and 2014?
2. What subgroups of the Syrian population did the Islamic State target and why?
3. Did these subgroups of the Syrian population have increased access to Islamic State information?

Assumptions

The study used the following assumptions. These assumptions will be either accepted or rejected once conclusions are drawn. The assumptions are:

1. Social media played an important role in the metamorphosis of IS in Syria between 2011 and 2014.

³³ Oliver Holmes, "Militants pull out of Lebanese border town with captives," *Reuters*, August 7, 2014, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-security-arsal-idUSKBN0G70HC20140807>.

³⁴ BBC News, "Soldiers killed by Lebanon Car Bomb," March 29, 2014, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26805050>.

2. Although IS and JN are separate groups now, JN was subordinate to ISI during 2011-2014.

Limitations

1. The research is more time consuming than scientific/ quantitative research because of the interpretation and analysis of a large amount of data.
2. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the covered platforms of social media.
3. The rift between JN and ISI is not covered.
4. The relationships between the leaders of JN, ISI, and AQ are not covered.
5. The consolidation of jihadist groups already established in Syria is not covered.
6. The funding sources for JN are not considered within the thesis.
7. Evolution of IS, during this timeframe, is not covered.
8. The danger of viruses and malware attacks from terrorists to researchers is the most common limitation for the researchers to investigate more.

Definitions

Terms associated with IS are instrumental to understanding its evolution. Alone, each term warrants deeper analysis that is outside the scope of this thesis. As such, each term is defined below in an effort to provide a simplified foundation for the analysis within this thesis and reduce any ambiguity associated with future discussions of these concepts in subsequent chapters.

Al- Qaeda: Arabic for “the Base,” is an international terrorist network founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s. Al- Qaeda grew out of the Services Office, a

clearinghouse for the international Muslim brigade that opposed to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the 1980s, the Services Office—run by bin Laden and the Palestinian religious scholar Abdullah Azzam—recruited, trained, and financed thousands of foreign mujahideen, or holy warriors, from more than fifty countries. AQ seeks to rid Muslim countries of what it sees as the profane influence of the West, and replace their governments with fundamentalist Islamic regimes. Operating globally, AQ is affiliated with many other terror groups including: Egyptian Islamic Jihad, The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, AQ in the Arabian Peninsula, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad (Kashmir), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, AQ in the Islamic Maghreb (Algeria), Armed Islamic Group (Algeria), Abu Sayyaf Group (Malaysia, Philippines), and Jemaah Islamiya (Southeast Asia).³⁵

Arab Spring: “Is the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests occurring in the Middle East and in North Africa since 2010. The economic crisis led the population of several countries to defy their authoritarian governments.”³⁶

ISIS/ ISIL/ Da’ish/ IS/ IS group: The organization that is central to this thesis is a militant movement that has conquered territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria, where it is attempting to establish an Islamic State. These territories incorporate about six and a half million residents. The group that calls itself IS can trace its lineage to the aftermath

³⁵ Jayshree Bjoria and Greg Bruno, “Al-Qaeda (a.k.a. Al-Qaida, Al-Qa’ida),” *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 6, 2012, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-k-al-qaida-al-qaida/p9126>.

³⁶ YouTube, “Here’s why the Arab world is in trouble!,” February 11, 2014, accessed December 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuVRwDBiKws>.

of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi aligned his “Jama’at al-Tawhid w’al-Jihad” (JTWJ)³⁷ with Al- Qaeda, making it Al- Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which employed terrorist and insurgent activities, and became a conventional militia.³⁸ The name of the organization, itself, has changed multiple times – ISIL, ISIS, Da’ish, IS, and the IS group – which generates argument and confusion. As such, for the purpose of this thesis, the differences will be addressed to provide the needed clarity concerning the name of this group.³⁹

Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS): The militant group gained this name after it invaded Syria in 2013. The original name for the group in Arabic was Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham. The first three words translate to the Islamic State of Iraq while “al-Sham” refers to Syria and the wider surrounding area.⁴⁰

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): ISIL is the term the U.S. government uses the group. The word ‘Levant’ is used because it is the translation for “al-Sham,” which is the Arabic name for the geographical region, The term ‘Levant’ refers to the

³⁷ Translation of “the Monotheism and Jihad Group.”

³⁸ Zachary Laub, “The Islamic State,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated August 10, 2016, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>.

³⁹ Philip Ross, “ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?,” *International Business Times*, September 23, 2014, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isil-isis-islamic-state-daesh-whats-difference-1693495>.

⁴⁰ Lizzie Dearden, “Isis vs Islamic State vs Isil vs Daesh: What do the different names mean – and why does it matter?,” *Independent*, September 23, 2014, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-vs-islamicstate-vs-isil-vs-daesh-what-do-the-different-names-mean-9750629.html>.

eastern shore of the Mediterranean – Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Jordan as illustrated in figure 2.⁴¹



Figure 2. The Levant Map

Source: Thomas, "Limbaugh Exposes Why Obama Says 'ISIL' Instead Of 'ISIS' – Shocking!," *The Political Insider*, December 9, 2015, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://thepoliticalinsider.com/limbaugh-exposes-why-obama-says-isil-instead-of-isis-shocking/>.

Da'ish: The militant group loathes this term. The group threatened, "To cut the tongue of anyone who publicly used the acronym Da'ish, instead of referring to the group by its full name."⁴² Since the attacks in Paris in September 2014, the French President, François Hollande, uses this term consistently. The practice of using Da'ish, as a term,

⁴¹ Maria Vultaggio, "ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?," *International Business Times*, November 16, 2015, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isil-isis-islamic-state-daesh-whats-difference-2187131>.

⁴² Ross, "ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?"

emphasis that IS is a terrorist group and not a state.⁴³ It is an Arabic acronym for “al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham (DAIISH),” and is sometimes spelled Da'esh or Daech, which is a popular French version. Arabs call it ‘Da’ish’.⁴⁴

Islamic State (IS): This is the English version of what the terror group calls itself. In June 2014, after seizing territories in Iraq’s Sunni heartland, including the cities of Mosul and Tikrit, al-Baghdadi as leader of IS proclaimed a Caliphate, which is Arabic for “successor of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad,” claiming exclusive political and theological authority over the world’s Muslims.⁴⁵ Many governments and media refuse to use this name because it gives the group legitimacy as a state and a representative of Islam.⁴⁶

Islamic State group: Some media institutions prefer the term Islamic State group because “the word ‘state’ indicates a system of administration and governance.”⁴⁷ David L. Phillips, the director of the Peace-Building and Rights Program at Columbia University, stated, “it’s not a term that would be used to characterize a terrorist group or militia that is merely rolling up territory.” The Associated Press (AP), for example, recently used IS group “to avoid phrasing that sounds like they could be fighting for an

⁴³ Dearden, “Isis vs Islamic State vs Isil vs Daesh: What do the different names mean – and why does it matter?”

⁴⁴ Vultaggio, “ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?”

⁴⁵ Zachary Laub, “The Islamic State,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, updated August 10, 2016, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>.

⁴⁶ Vultaggio, “ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?”

⁴⁷ Ross, “ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?”

internationally recognized state.”⁴⁸ Table 1 illustrates the names of the organization versus the most common users of them.

Table 1. Organization’s name versus common addressers

	ISIL	ISIS	Da’ish	IS	IS group
US and UK	The Levant is the translation for the Arabic term “al-Sham”				
France			It is used to avoid legitimizing terrorists as being a “State”		
Arabs/ Muslims		A translation of the organization’s Arabic name			
Islamic extremists/ Islamic State group leaders		It is the translation of the Arabic name used by the group when invaded Syrian lands in 2013.		It is used for the recognition of the declared Caliphate in June 2014.	
Some Media organizations					It is used to avoid using the word 'state' indicates a system of administration and governance

Source: Created by Author.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Islamism: Refers to the broad range of political movements and parties that share the belief that principles drawn from the Islamic tradition should have a substantial influence on the public sphere and on the manner in which a society conducts or organizes its political life.⁴⁹

Islamists: Members of Islam who reject the notion of a separation between religion and public life. Islamists believe that ideals, values, or principles rooted in Islam are relevant to the modern world, and that they provide useful guidance on contemporary political and public-policy issues.⁵⁰

Jihad: According to the Islamic Supreme Council of America, the Arabic word “Jihad” means “struggling” or “striving” for the God. Within a religious context, as stated in the holy book Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (s), “jihad” refers to the efforts to be a good Muslims or believer, as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam. Military jihad, which is a rare meaning of “jihad,” is required to protect the faith against others using legal, diplomatic, economic, and political means. Islam also allows the use of force if peaceful options failed, but with strict rules of engagement. Innocents - like women, children, and patients - must never be abused, and any peaceful overtures from the enemy must be accepted. Individuals cannot declare “jihad.” The religious authority of the military campaign, advised by scholars, declare “jihad” when the religion and people are under threat of violence and requires defense. The theory of

⁴⁹ Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” United States Agency for International Development, February 2009, 86, accessed December 23, 2016, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadt978.pdf.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“just war” is very important to this process. Historically, political and religious groups have hijacked the concept of “jihad” and named themselves as jihadists to justify the use of violence. Scholars such as the Islamic Supreme Council of America consider the term “jihad” misused and the concept and meaning contradict Islam. They argue that “Jihad” does not declare war against other religions, “people of the book believe in [the] same God,” who should be protected and esteemed.⁵¹

Propaganda: A form of communication in which state and non-state actors have near or total control over the transmission of information, typically relying on mass media to reach its target audiences, using language and symbols in a deceptive and manipulative fashion to gain support.⁵²

Psychological Operations: Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives.⁵³

⁵¹ The Islamic Supreme Council of America, *Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam - What Jihad is, and is not*, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/5-jihad-a-misunderstood-concept-from-islam.html?start=9>

⁵² Richard M. Perloff, *The Dynamics of Persuasion: Communication and Attitudes in the 21st Century* 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 28.

⁵³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), 152, accessed December 2, 2016, https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf.

Recruitment: To seek out, evaluate, obtain commitment from, place, and orient new employees to fill positions required for the successful conduct of the work of an organization.⁵⁴

Salafism: A literalist Sunni theological and legal orientation that takes its name from the expression “al-salaf al-salih,” which means “the pious predecessors.” This phrase refers to the first three generations of Muslims who represent the religion’s “golden age.” According to Salafists, these early Muslims most accurately preserved the Prophet Muhammad’s statements and actions because they knew him or those close to him. Salafists seek to adhere to the reports of Muhammad’s words and deeds (sunnah) and to avoid innovation (bid‘a).⁵⁵

Skill: An ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills). A technical skill is a skill that is required for the accomplishment of a specific task. Communication skills are the ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Yvonne Andrews, *The Personnel Function* (Pretoria: Pearson South Africa, 1988), 94.

⁵⁵ Jacob Olidort, “The Politics of ‘Quietist’ Salafism,” Brookings Institute, February 2015, accessed November 3, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/salafism-quietist-politics-olidort/brookings-analysis-paper_jacob-olidort-inside_final_web.pdf, 7.

⁵⁶ Business Dictionary, “Skill,” accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/skill.html>.

Social Media Networks (SMNs): “Online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration.”⁵⁷

Task: The smallest identifiable and essential piece of a job that serves as a unit of work, and as a means of differentiating between the various components of a project.⁵⁸

Technique: A systematic procedure, formula, or routine by which a task is accomplished.⁵⁹

Terrorism: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”⁶⁰

Tools of social media: Are websites that “interact with the users, while giving them information.” It is this two-way nature of SMNs, along with the role they played in the Arab Spring’s uprisings, that is central to this argument.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Alex Newson, Deryck Houghton, and Justin Patten, *Blogging and Other Social Media: Exploiting the Technology and Protecting the Enterprise* (England: Gower Publishing, 2008), 3.

⁵⁸ Business Dictionary, “Task,” accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/task.html>.

⁵⁹ Business Dictionary, “Technique,” accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/technique.html>.

⁶⁰ Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, Google eBooks, January 1, 2011, accessed November 4, 2011, [https://books.google.com/books?id=LWF-twYVE7sC&dq=the+Federal+Bureau+of+Investigation+\(FBI\)+defines+terrorism+as+%E2%80%9Cthe+unlawful+use+of+force+or+violence+against+persons+or+property+to+intimidate+or+coerce+a+government,+the+civilian+population,+or+a](https://books.google.com/books?id=LWF-twYVE7sC&dq=the+Federal+Bureau+of+Investigation+(FBI)+defines+terrorism+as+%E2%80%9Cthe+unlawful+use+of+force+or+violence+against+persons+or+property+to+intimidate+or+coerce+a+government,+the+civilian+population,+or+a).

⁶¹ Adeyinka Tella, *Social Media Strategies for Dynamic Library Service Development*, Google eBooks, December 31, 2014, 250, accessed November 5, 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=bS91CQAAQBAJ&pg=PR13&lpg=PR13&dq=Tools>

Outline of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the problem by first focusing on how the Arab Spring reached Syria and describing why some Syrians joined the protest. Then, IS's use of social media to link operations between Iraq and Syria is introduced, thus leading to the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate that evolved into IS. Chapter 2 provides the review of literature relevant to the study. The chapter begins with the review of literature pertaining to the role of social media in the Syrian Arab Spring, then the examination of expert analysis associated with IS social media successes after 2014, followed by relevant collective action theories. Chapter 3 defines the research methodology and design applied within this study. Chapter 4 presents the data collected categorized by the three guiding sub-questions which are used to make inferences that, when combined, facilitates answering the main research question. Finally, chapter 5 presents findings and conclusions based on the analysis, answering the primary and the guidance sub-questions, verifying the study assumptions, and suggesting topics for further study.

Summary

After the Arab Spring occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and finally in Syria, social media became known as a tool for social change. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube played a major role in the Arab Spring. Activists used social media in Tunisia and Egypt to organize political protests, thus increasing their size and

+of+social+media-+are+websites+that+%E2%80%9Cinteract+with+the+users,+while+giving+them+information.%E2%80%9D+It+is+this+two-way+nature+of+SMNs+that+is+central+to+this+argument,+and+t.

scope. Activist leaders used the same strategy in Syria. The leaders of IS successfully used the same social media platforms to convince the Syrian population to adopt its terroristic ideology.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of current and historical literature pertaining to the use of social media to cultivate collective strength by uniting people with a common set of objectives. Though this thesis subject is specific to IS, the concept of social mobilization is not exclusive to them. Other organizations have been studied to describe the concept of social mobilization and will be critically reviewed to assist in the creation of a conceptual framework that will be applied throughout the remainder of the study. This chapter is organized into three sections: The role of social media in Syria's Arab Spring, IS's use of social media past 2014, and theoretical models associated with collective action (Table 2).

Table 2. Literature Review Source Overview

	Books	Articles	Doctrine	Monographs
The role of social media on Syria's Arab Spring	8	40	3	10
IS's use of social media	8	95	3	12
Theory	10	20	5	3
Total (217)	26	155	11	25

Source: Created by Author.

The role of Social Media in the Syrian Arab Spring

The 2011 Arab Spring surprised not only the governments that were directly targeted by the social movements, but also the international community. Any organized political opposition may create mobilization networks in a society that then most

probably threaten the stability within the governmental institutions. The ability to communicate on social media acted as a catalyst for the Syrian revolutionary movement. As such, it is necessary to understand the literature that describes how people in Syria used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and some instruments like the camera phones, to encourage collective action to seek political freedom, social justice, and the removal of the al-Assad regime.

The journalist Kimberlee Morrison in her article “The Evolution of Social Media,” concludes that social media escalated significantly over the last sixteen years. Since 2001, Internet users live in the ‘golden age’ of social media.⁶² There are large quantities of data available on the Internet. There are sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat that provide an interface for users to not only access the vast amounts of data, but also provide digital communities where people can congregate virtually. According to “Kwik turn media” progress estimations, there was an estimated 1.47 billion global social network active users in 2012, which reached 2.55 billion in 2017.⁶³

More specifically, during the 2011 Arab Spring, protestors used the social tools available on the internet to share ideas, social mobilization techniques, and gain popular

⁶² Kimberlee Morrison, “The Evolution of Social Media [Infographic],” *Social Times*, May 29, 2015, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/the-evolution-of-social-media-infographic/620911>.

⁶³ EMarketer, “Social Networking Reaches Nearly One in Four Around the World,” June 18, 2013, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Social-Networking-Reaches-Nearly-One-Four-Around-World/1009976>; Kwik turn media, “Social Networking Sees Widespread Growth Around the World,” February 19, 2014, accessed January 15, 2017, <https://kwikturnmedia.com/blog/social-networking-sees-widespread-growth-around-the-world/>.

support that allowed the rapid spread of analogous active social movements across North Africa and the Middle East. This resulted in mass cyber communities united by similar aspirations. In this domain, the professors Richard Fox and Jennifer Ramos, in their iBook: *iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era*, wrote that social media provide new opportunities for citizens to express and organize themselves around their political interests.⁶⁴ The writers argue that social media tools like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were critical to organizing citizen protests in Northern Africa and the Middle East in 2011.⁶⁵ The Syrian rebels used social media tools to organize and schedule events. Syrian rebels preferred using Facebook posts to coordinate events and prearranged protest slogans in tweets using Twitter.⁶⁶ Experts like Deborah Wheeler and Lauren Mintz published an article named “New Media and Political Change: Lessons from Internet users in Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait” that educated activists about how to use social media to mobilize the masses and demand better governance. SMN and tools proved instrumental by providing new tools and resources to the opposition; however, the Syrian opposition diverged from the other regional movements.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Richard L. Fox and Jennifer M. Ramos, *iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3, accessed September 2, 2016, http://assets.cambridge.org/9781107015951/frontmatter/9781107015951_frontmatter.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Deborah L Wheeler and Lauren Mintz, “New Media and Political Change: Lessons from internet users in Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait,” Research Gate, January 2011, 259, accessed September 8, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290567286_New_media_and_political_change_Lessons_from_internet_users_in_Jordan_Egypt_and_Kuwait.

Syria is a discrete case in analyzing the Arab Spring movements, since the timeline of events differed from the protests in Egypt and Tunisia. A key characteristic was the slow growth of Syrian protestors against the government, later called “Against the al-Assad regime.”⁶⁸ It grew, in part, because of the Syrian Armed Forces’ repression of the people to prevent them from massing to protest. In early February 2011, Syrian protestors started creating Facebook pages that were shared widely among themselves, one of which called for protests across the country on February fourth and fifth.⁶⁹ More than 16,000 Syrians, who were informed by monitoring Facebook, expressed support. However, the demonstrations, which were organized entirely on Facebook, did not occur because the people feared the Syrian regime apparatus.⁷⁰ Arab Social Media estimated that the number of Facebook users in Syria is 17.44 percent of the Arab countries users of Facebook, even though Syria is considered low-ranked country for the usage of Facebook in the world.⁷¹

The fear was legitimate because protest groups that mobilized prior to February 2011 were violently repressed by the Syrian security forces. For example, in 2004, Kurds

⁶⁸ Wheeler and Mintz, “New Media and Political Change: Lessons from internet users in Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Soraya Chemaly and Catherine Buni, “The Secret Rules of the Internet,” The Investigation Fund, April 13, 2016, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.theinvestigativefund.org/investigations/rightsliberties/2226/Most%20Read?page=entire>.

⁷¹ Arab Social Media Report, “Facebook in the Arab Region,” February 17, 2014, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx>.

revolted in Qamishli and Syrian security forces killed at least 100 Kurds.⁷² Following that incident, thousands of Syrian Kurds fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. Another example occurred in 1982 in Hama, Syria when Islamists protested in opposition to the Syrian government.⁷³ That day, now known as the Hama Massacre, the Syrian Army killed 2000 Syrian civilians as they attempted to quell the uprising.⁷⁴ On February 9, 2011, Al Jazeera described Syria as a “kingdom of silence” because anti-government protests did not happen for many years.⁷⁵ This was largely due to fear. A 21-year-old activist who referred to herself as Rana for fear of reprisal from the Syrian government stated, “I am too scared to speak about my political activity on Facebook and I am not going to open a Twitter account.”⁷⁶

Despite this valid deep-seated fear, Syrian activists understood that the Internet was their only available option to develop safe communities, though virtual in nature, to

⁷² Revolv, “2004 al-Qamishli Riots,” accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.revolv.com/main/index.php?s=2004%20al-Qamishli%20riots>.

⁷³ Brynjar Lia, “The Islamist Uprising in Syria, 1976–82: The History and Legacy of a Failed Revolt,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, February 8, 2016, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13530194.2016.1139442?src=recsys&journalCode=cbjm20>.

⁷⁴ William R. Polk, “Understanding Syria: From Pre-Civil War to Post-Assad,” *The Atlantic*, December 10, 2013, accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/understanding-syria-from-pre-civil-war-to-post-assad/281989/>.

⁷⁵ Caisa Wikstorm, “Syria: ‘A kingdom of silence’,” *Al Jazeera English*, February 9, 2011, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/02/201129103121562395.html>.

⁷⁶ Reuters, “Social Media: A Double Edged Sword in Syria,” July 13, 2011, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-social-media-idUSTRE76C3DB20110713>.

bring like-minded people together as well as reach sympathizers outside of Syria to entice support for mass demonstrations. The internet was fundamental to the coalescence of the Syrian people. Although the internet provides relative safety, protest organizers used additional safety measures. Opposition planners used social media to organize Syrian non-violent collective action but they would not provide the protest location until the latest possible time before the event. Reuters claims that “you don't know what time it will start until just before it actually starts.”⁷⁷ This security tactic proved successful because in March 2011, the protestors gained momentum partly due the creation of local coordination committees.

The Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) were created initially to document the Syrian revolution, but they evolved into the primary organizers of protests and information disseminators.⁷⁸ There are 70 local LCCs that are networked across Syria. Carnegie Middle East Center states that the committee members include “young Syrian journalists and human rights activists from different ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds operating within Syria.”⁷⁹ These young Syrians emerged as leaders because of the necessity to coordinate local civic activism due to the absence of any other civil society organizations. The non-fanatic religious male and female youths that act as the LCC organizers are highly educated revolutionary volunteers, which provided a new look

⁷⁷ Reuters, “Social Media: A Double Edged Sword in Syria.”

⁷⁸ Carnegie Middle East Center, “Local Coordination Committees of Syria,” December 20, 2012, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50426?lang=en>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

for the opposition. The primary objective of the organizations is to overthrow the Syrian regime.⁸⁰ As information disseminators, the LCCs are responsible for reporting updates on the movement to Arab and international media. The primary means of reporting is through the LCC website and its Facebook page.⁸¹

In March 2011 and parallel to the efforts of the LCCs, Syrian activists created a Facebook page called “The Syrian Revolution 2011,” which was the first official Facebook page of the Syrian revolution.⁸² It had up to 120,000 followers who were primarily from within Syria but there was also representation from the global anti-Assad diaspora. This Facebook page served as the chief communication platform to inform Syrian dissenters, which produced a rallying effect for all those involved.⁸³ Furthermore, social media provided a mechanism to reveal human rights violations to the international media. Media channels monitored the “The Syrian Revolution 2011” Facebook page to get pictures and videos of what was happening in Syria which facilitated the propagation of the reality that Syrian protestors faced. In addition to this Facebook page, other pages

⁸⁰ Carnegie Middle East Center, “Local Coordination Committees of Syria.”

⁸¹ Amer Abu Hamed, “Syria’s Local Coordination Committees: The Dynamo of a Hijacked Revolution,” Knowledge Programme Civil Society In West Asia, May 5, 2014, accessed December 20, 2016, https://hivos.org/sites/default/files/syrias_lccs-dynamo_of_highjacked_revolution.pdf.

⁸² Alexandra Sandels, “SYRIA: Facebook group calls for uprisings all over Syria on Saturday,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2011, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/03/syria-facebook-group-calls-for-uprisings-all-over-the-country-on-saturday.html>.

⁸³ Zeina Karam, “Social media’s role in the Syrian civil war,” *Global News*, October 19, 2013, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.mediameasurement.com/the-role-of-social-media-in-the-syrian-civil-war/>.

on Facebook emerged, facilitating the transmission of information to both local and worldwide audiences.⁸⁴ There were three Facebook pages in particular that played a central role in the revolution: ‘We are all Hamzeh Al-Khateeb,’ ‘Syrian revolution 2011,’ and ‘Euphrates Revolution Network’ (ERN).⁸⁵ In addition to these Facebook pages, Twitter was also used as a platform to mobilize Syria’s opposition.

In the Internet realm of social mobilization, Twitter functions in a centralized networking role as a clearinghouse for revolutionary propaganda.⁸⁶ Twitter enabled the leaders of the Syrian opposition to create a substantial network of Internet supporters. On Twitter, opposition organizers published videos and tweets revealing violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime that resulted in an emotionally energized effect on supporters. Zeina Karam in her article “Social Media’s role in the Syrian Civil War” estimated that in January 2012 the twitter account “#SyrianRevolution” had 183 thousand tweets, 23.4 thousand photos and videos posted, and 144 thousand followers.⁸⁷

Twitter also emerged as a coordination tool. Kim Ghattas in the article “Syria’s spontaneously organized protests,” describes the clash between protesting Syrians and the Syrian army that conducted operations against them. As a result of the Syrian army

⁸⁴ Hannah Stuart and Michael Weiss, “The Syrian opposition: Political analysis with original testimony from key figures,” The Henry Jackson Society, June 6, 2011, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2011/06/06/the-syrian-opposition-political-analysis-with-original-testimony-from-key-figures/>.

⁸⁵ Shehabat, “The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011.”

⁸⁶ Karam, “Social media’s role in the Syrian civil war.”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

operations, the protestors began to adapt by using twitter. Twitter offered the protestors flood of slogans for people to use during demonstrations across the country - many suggested by fellow Twitter users such as: “Freedom . . . freedom . . . no more Baathist anymore” as the account of @SyRevoSlogans, created on April 18, 2011.⁸⁸ Whereas, other accounts gave motivational names as the user @syrianjasmine who named the protestors as “thugs,” being bussed into the town of Daraa. While some accounts reflected activities of the protestors as the account @wissamtarif that revealed the student protests activities and arbitrary detentions in the capital Damascus.⁸⁹

Ahmad Shehabat in his article “The social media cyber-war: The unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011,” observed that videos uploaded to YouTube from people’s cell phones were their primary retaliatory weapon against the Syrian regime during demonstrations.⁹⁰ The people of Syria used cell phones videos and photos uploaded to social media to expose the Syrian regime to the whole world. It was an alternative method to broadcast worldwide, since the Syrian channels did not cover the revolution because of regime censorship. In Syria, the Media ministry controls the TV and radio broadcast networks. The Media ministry operates two TV networks, a satellite channel,

⁸⁸ Kim Ghattas, “Syria’s spontaneously organized protests,” *BBC News*, 2011, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/worldmiddle-east-13168276>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Shehabat, “The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011.”

and three radio channels.⁹¹ Between 2011 and 2014 period, the official Syrian media only transmitted news supporting the regime, while neglecting all protestors' activities that occurred because the Syrian regime believed global actors, like USA, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, wanted to weaken Syria.

Despite the government's attempts to censor the media and regime violence, shocking bloody videos were uploaded to YouTube or sent to satellite channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia to ensure the facts reached a wider global audience. On May 30, 2011, a video was uploaded to YouTube that showed the dead body of a 13 year-old boy, named "Hamzeh Alkhateeb."⁹² His body was badly bruised, with burn marks and three gunshot wounds. This video sparked international outrage.⁹³ Activists created a Facebook page called "We Are All Hamzeh Alkhateeb," which attracted many followers.⁹⁴ After this incident, live broadcast news and information usually took place on Facebook and YouTube.

Jennifer Preston in her article "Seeking to Disrupt Protesters, Syria Cracks Down on Social Media" argues that the Syrian government began targeting activists on social

⁹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Syria," March 25, 2014, accessed January, 4, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>.

⁹² Neal Ungerleider, "YouTube Video Of A Tortured, Murdered 13-Year-Old Is Syria's Modern Emmett Till Moment," Fast Company, March 6, 2011, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/1756775/youtube-video-tortured-murdered-13-year-old-syrias-modern-emmett-till-moment-update>.

⁹³ Shehabat, "The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011."

⁹⁴ Ungerleider, "YouTube Video Of A Tortured, Murdered 13-Year-Old Is Syria's Modern Emmett Till Moment."

media.⁹⁵ The purpose of this targeting was two-fold. First, the regime monitored social media in order to identify people associated with the protests. Secondly, the regime wanted to limit the spread of information on-line. This targeting methodology was effective because of the regime's extensive censorship protocols that involved sequential blocking and allowing access to the internet and social media sites.⁹⁶ This was illustrated when Syrian officials denied temporarily the access to the Internet as well as the 3G mobile Internet in Damascus, Daraa, and Homs, in order to control uploading videos and photos of protests inside Syria to the world.⁹⁷ Additionally, the Syrian regime created a cyber-army to continue the virtual conflict.⁹⁸

As such, the opposition developed mechanisms to remain connected. Syrians began smuggling SIM cards from neighboring countries. The people in Daraa, which is close to the border of Jordan, smuggled Jordanian SIM cards into Syria to keep their phones active, while the Syrian people in the north close to the Turkish border, would smuggle Turkish SIM cards into the country. Ahmad Shehabat stated that smartphones

⁹⁵ Jennifer Preston, "Seeking to Disrupt Protesters, Syria Cracks Down on Social Media," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2011, accessed October 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/23/world/middleeast/23facebook.html?_r=1&.

⁹⁶ Abdelberi Chaabane et al., "Censorship in the Wild: Analyzing Web Filtering in Syria," Cornell University Library, February 14, 2014, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1402.3401>.

⁹⁷ Shehabat, "The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011."

⁹⁸ Preston, "Seeking to Disrupt Protesters, Syria Cracks Down on Social Media."

and the 3G wireless Internet access also played a significant role for the rebels despite the Syrian government banning the use and import of iPhones into the country.⁹⁹

As shown from the literature review, the protestors used social media as a tool to expedite and facilitate their protest against the Syrian regime. That encouraged IS to use the same mean in Syria to build organizational social media capabilities to recruit, fund, and coordinates its operations to accomplish its goals.

IS and Social Media

Mobilization through the use of social media is not limited to peaceful protestors. Terrorist networks require similar capabilities to recruit, raise funds, and deter opposition. As such, this section examines the literature illustrating IS's successful use of social media to establish a foundation within Syria and project the perception of strength regionally. The literature presented within this section seeks to identify IS's social media achievements before and after 2014 in order to determine the capabilities that it had between 2011 and 2014.

Often, intimidation is used to make victims succumb and not argue, object, or ask for their basic human rights. IS use of choreographed videos in which cameras are set to capture pictures from different angles have been very influential, threatening and

⁹⁹ Shehabat, "The social media cyber-war: the unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011."

coercive. The video of 250 captured Syrian soldiers, who were stripped and led into the desert for a mass execution in August 2014, provides an example.¹⁰⁰

Authors of the United States Department of State Publication report, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*, cover IS's violent activities through the year 2015 inside and outside Syria. In Syria, IS committed a number of brutal murders against hostages and victims, such as the beheading of the Japanese citizens Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto in January.¹⁰¹ In February, It killed the U.S. aid worker Kayla Mueller and burned downed-Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh.¹⁰² In November, it shot to death the Norwegian Ole Johan Grimsgaard-Ofstad and the Chinese Fan Jinghui.¹⁰³ All these actions were posted on social media platforms. The writers of the report posed a dilemma for companies such as YouTube, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and others. Facebook, for example, has grappled with whether or not to allow videos of beheadings. On March 16, 2015, Facebook modified its "community standards" to prohibit violence and any dangerous organizations that are engaged in terrorist activity or organized criminal activity.¹⁰⁴ It also removed content that expresses support for groups that are involved in

¹⁰⁰ CBS News, "ISIS militants carry out apparent mass execution in Syria," August 28, 2014, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-militants-execute-dozens-of-captured-syrian-soldiers-activists-say/>.

¹⁰¹ United States Department of State Publication, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*, June 2016, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258249.pdf>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ United States Department of State Publication, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*.

violent or criminal behavior. Facebook also banned the supporting or flattering of the leaders of same organizations, or ignoring their violent actions.¹⁰⁵

In 2013, the reporters Ines von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, and Luke Gribbon wrote a report named *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism in the UK*. They found that the Internet enables more opportunities to become radicalized, because of its availability across the world 24/7. For all 15 users, the Internet had been a key source of information and communication for their extremist beliefs.¹⁰⁶

Jihadists used social media, primarily Twitter, in their operations in Syria, Iraq, and other countries. Jonathon Morgan and J. M. Berger assert in their paper “The IS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of IS Supporters on Twitter” that from September through December of 2014, IS supporters used at least 46,000 Twitter accounts, although not all of them were active at the same time. Most IS supporters were located within Syria and Iraq, as well as in opposition regions of Syria.¹⁰⁷ Hundreds of IS-supporting accounts sent tweets with location identifications. Almost one in five IS supporters designated English as their main language while using Twitter. Three-quarters

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ines von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, and Luke Gribbon, *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2013), accessed October 1, 2016, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathon Morgan and J. M. Berger, “The IS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter,” Brookings, March 5, 2015, accessed September 19, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-isis-twitter-census-defining-and-describing-the-population-of-isis-supporters-on-twitter/>.

chose Arabic. IS-supporting accounts were active; each account had an average of about 1,000 followers. From September to December 2014, Twitter suspended approximately 1,000 IS-supporting accounts to block account activities. Twitter likely suspended those accounts that tweeted most often and had the most followers. Much of IS's social media can be recognized to a comparatively small group of active users, numbering between 500 and 2,000 accounts that tweet in concentrated bursts of high volume.¹⁰⁸

However, the growth of the IS movement on Twitter may not provide an accurate number of followers. The accuracy of the volume of social media content associated with the movement would be influenced by fake accounts and its relative generated comments. Klausen Jytte's article entitled, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," collected informational data over a period of three months, from the Twitter accounts of 59 Western-origin fighters known to be in Syria. Using a snowball method, which is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances, 59 accounts were used to collect data about the most popular accounts in the network.¹⁰⁹ Social network analysis on the data collated about Twitter users in the Western Syria-based fighters points to two conclusions. First is the controlling role played by feeder accounts belonging to terrorist organizations in the insurgency area. Second that Europe-based organizational accounts were associated with Al Muhajiroun, the banned British

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Leo A. Goodman, "Snowball Sampling," *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics* 32, no. 1 (1961): 148-170, accessed January 14, 2017, <https://projecteuclid.org/euclid.aoms/1177705148>.

organization, and in particular with Anjem Choudary, the London-based preacher.¹¹⁰ This gives an evidence that extreme Jihadists work within different organizations and give inaccurate numbers of followers upon researching.

Social media companies have to address IS threats to their employees as well. IS has not only put journalists to death but also threatened employees of Twitter. Twitter employees attempted to block accounts promoting violence at crucial times because the timing of the release of information on social media is decisive to the success of planning, recruiting, and funding of terrorist networks.¹¹¹ The larger the prospective audience, the more the intended message is propagated. Timing contributes to the terrorists' message reaching the masses, reflects violence, and is deeply internalized into people's minds.¹¹²

Brenden I. Kderner in his article "Why ISIS is Winning the Social Media War" in April 2016, groups IS's social media achievements in five themes: (1) Cultivate the brand, through messaging propaganda on social media to win the hearts of potential recruits and to boost the organization's ghastly brand. (2) Innovate across platforms, in taking pride in its flair for developing innovative and repugnant content through high-

¹¹⁰ Jytte Klauen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism Journal* 38, no. 1 (2015): 1-22, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2014.974948>.

¹¹¹ Julia Greenberg, "Why Facebook and Twitter Can't Just Wipe Out ISIS Online," *Wired Business*, November 21, 2015, accessed March 4, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2015/11/facebook-and-twitter-face-tough-choices-as-isis-exploits-social-media/>.

¹¹² Greenberg, "Why Facebook and Twitter Can't Just Wipe Out ISIS Online."

tech scenes videos some of which captured by a drone. (3) Crowdsourcing the distribution, by means of its widely distributed high-quality media via different social media channels. (4) Inspire real-world action, as a result of recruiting people and convincing them that recruiters' violence actions must show their following to God and their pledging allegiance to IS. Finally, (5) steer the conversation, via focusing on their ability to governance In the area it controlled.¹¹³

In the article "The Media Strategy of IS," James Farwell provided an analysis concerning IS's social media strategy. IS leaders seem like to spot that social media is a double-edged sword. The group tries to protect the identity and location of its leaders by minimizing electronic communications among top cadres. The leaders often use couriers to hand deliver command-and-control messages, and use social media primarily to deliver propaganda. Still, advances in technology may eventually leave IS vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Similar to those US intelligence sources reportedly used to intercept and seize funds belonging to Mexican drug cartels. Ultimately, defeating IS will require focused efforts aimed at discrediting and delegitimizing the group's narrative among Muslims, while working towards its eradication. One hopes the policymakers building coalitions and launching strikes against IS have these aims in mind, and will calibrate their narratives, themes and messages accordingly.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Brenden I. Kderner, "Why ISIS is Winning the Social Media War," *Wired*, April 2016, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>.

¹¹⁴ James P. Farewell, "The Media Strategy of ISIS," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, December 1, 2014, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://www.iiss.org/en/publications/survival/sections/2014-4667/survival--global-politics-and-strategy-december-2014-january-2015-bf83/56-6-04-farwell-97ca>.

Social media networking organizations located in Silicon Valley, are considered the media and social media capital of the world, are fighting against terrorism and violent extremism to maintain a free and open network. Facebook, Twitter, and Google (YouTube) have censured terrorism and have pledged to crack down on terrorists who use their sites. As IS grows, the networks have worked to take increased action against terrorism by updating their “terms of service” policies. For example, Twitter forbids “direct, specific threats of violence.”¹¹⁵ YouTube states that it’s “not okay to post violent or gory content that’s primarily intended to be shocking.”¹¹⁶ Facebook specifies that it does not allow “terrorist activity” and “organized criminal activity” and states that “supporting or praising leaders of those same organizations, or condoning their violent activities, is not allowed.”¹¹⁷

Twitter and Facebook recently updated their terms of service, the first in February 2015 and the second in March 2015. Twitter released a blog post in February 2015 titled “Combating Violent Extremism,” stating that it had suspended 125,000 IS-related accounts over the past six months.¹¹⁸ Yet, Twitter users regularly criticized this site when any violent incidents occurred, whether related to terrorism or not. The latest critique to

¹¹⁵ Kerry Flynn, “ISIS Propaganda Lawsuit: Twitter, Google and Facebook Sued by Father of Paris Attack Victim,” *International Business Times*, June 15, 2016, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-propaganda-lawsuit-twitter-google-facebook-sued-father-paris-attack-victim-2382522>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ YouTube, “Community Guidelines,” accessed December 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/policyandsafety/communityguidelines.html>.

¹¹⁸ Flynn, “ISIS Propaganda Lawsuit: Twitter, Google and Facebook Sued by Father of Paris Attack Victim.”

these sites was in a lawsuit over their supposed roles in fueling the rise of IS by allowing it to use their networks for spreading propaganda, raising funds and attracting recruits.¹¹⁹ The lawsuit's plaintiff was Reynaldo Gonzalez, the father of Nohemi Gonzalez, an American who was one of 130 victims of the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015.¹²⁰ Because of the volume of materials posted, these companies often rely on users reporting problematic content. the philosophy of these companies is generally to err on the side of non-censorship and freedom of speech.

In addition to actions taken by social media platforms, other programs were developed to fight terrorism on-line. The article written by Anne Aly, Weimann –Saks Dana, and Wimann Gabriel, named “Making ‘Noise’ Online: An Analysis of the Say No to Terror Online Campaign,” described a study that examined the master narratives that online campaign. “Making noise” on social media means to talk about something a lot, so that people will notice it and show them a kind of disapproval for a specific activity. The writers made the noise in order to assess whether the key elements of the ‘Say No to Terror’s campaign, which are aligned with the application of “noise” as a strategy against terrorists’ appeal on the Internet. The authors found that while the master narratives of ‘Say No to Terror’ align with suggestions based on empirical research for the development of effective counter campaigns. However, the campaign does not meet the essential criteria for effective noise. Its spread was limited without noticeable effect.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Anne Aly, Dana Weimann-Saks, and Gabriel Weimann, “Making 'Noise' Online: An Analysis of the Say No to Terror Online Campaign,” *Perspectives on*

The Noise against terrorism program needs to be conducted on a larger scale in order to see effective results.

The analysis of SMN, based on all the data found in the tools and applications like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others, leads to a good understanding of the structure of the terrorist organization. Richard Medina in *Social Network Analysis: A Case Study of the Islamist Terrorist Network*, illustrates the flexibility of the terrorist network structure. He refers to the terrorist network as a system composed of various terrorist organizations who have connections through social media to share ideas and coordinate to accomplish the same objectives. The network develops a communication medium for the organization, and offers the analyses to characterize this system on users, network, and wider spectators. Leaders' positions in the SMN lead the users to identify them. The terrorist network structure is resilient and efficient structure.¹²²

Collective Action Using Social Media

During the Syrian Arab Spring, social media was one of the means to formulate the gatherings and mobilize the demonstration against the Syrian regime. One Syrian activist acknowledged that demonstrations are difficult to organize in areas where people do not know each other and, perhaps as a result, do not trust each other.¹²³ Doug

Terrorism 8, no. 5 (2014): 33-47, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/376>.

¹²² Richard M. Medina, "Social Network Analysis: A Case Study of the Islamist Terrorist Network," *Spring Link: Security Journal* 27, no. 1 (February 2014): 97-121, accessed September 4, 2016, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2Fsj.2012.21>.

¹²³ Arnold, "Syria Witness: Stories of Allegiance, Protest and Survival."

McAdam and Paulsen Ronnelle in their article “Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism” claim that a key element of a social movement is the importance of strong, interpersonal social ties, as well as dense social ties in networks, as a means of facilitating individuals’ participation. These connections decrease the uncertainty of mobilization and fear from of the security apparatus.¹²⁴ Protesting is a risky act that can easily result in death. Protesters’ social ties are of great importance. As a result, the Syrian security forces tried to use brutal force to break these relationships.

As McAdam and Paulsen highlighted too, when a person resides in the same area as close friends or relatives this increases the likelihood of participation in neighborhood organizations. Living in close proximity provides the strong and dense network ties that encourage and facilitate participation.¹²⁵ It makes sense then that areas experiencing fewer protests were most likely unable to galvanize people on the ground because of weaker social ties. In addition to this, context regarding individuals’ multiple, simultaneous social ties can also be relevant in their decision to engage in protests, since the nature of these ties can provide sometimes-conflicting influences on whether or not to participate in the movement.¹²⁶

The Internet and social media provide the means to establish virtual communities to bring dissatisfied individuals together. Clay Shirky describes social media as a new

¹²⁴ Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, “Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 3 (November 1993): 641, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/chwe/ps269/mcadampaulsen.pdf>.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 644.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

social networking tool for people to access more information for collective action.¹²⁷ The emergence of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter as a method to communicate proved to be one of the means to society. The article of Dorothy Kidd titled “The Global movement to transform communications” claims that social media played a central role in democratizing communications; challenging the top-down frame of most conventional media and allowing a more shared communications between users.¹²⁸ Shirky argues that social media became the new coordinating tool because of its ability to comprise communication, organization, mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement.¹²⁹ This is an argument for plenty of information spread widely from social media platforms that broadcast from one user to groups of people.¹³⁰

Clay Shirky in his book *The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change*, asserts that social media did not play a central role in the evolution of social mobilization. It is difficult to judge whether recent uprisings such as the Arab Spring would not take place without social media tools.¹³¹ Social media

¹²⁷ Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011): 28-41.

¹²⁸ Dorothy Kidd, “Which would you rather: Seattle or Porto Alegre?” (International Association for Media and Communication Research, July 2002), accessed May 2, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/3894567/Which_would_you_rather_Seattle_or_Porto_Alegre.

¹²⁹ Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change.”

¹³⁰ John Downey and Natalie Fenton, “New media, counter publicity and the public sphere,” *New Media and Society* 5, no. 2 (2003): 185-202.

¹³¹ Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky, “From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (April 2011): 153-154,

allowed protestors to perform differently by the way they spread the word through social media to gather and demonstrate.¹³² Social media can create a booster to stimulate the formation and development of social movements.¹³³ Accordingly, social media plays the role of associate factor rather than causative factor in social movements.

IS also used social media platforms to facilitate its collective actions. Social and political theorists attempt to describe how populations are motivated toward collective action and introduced a variety of terms to illustrate their findings. One of the social science phenomena to develop social media strategies is the theory of “Domino Effect.” The Domino Effect illustrates potential causal linkages between events. Initially theorized in association to the spread of communism into Indochina, now the domino effect describes the proliferation of ideas through social media.¹³⁴ Ideas perpetuated through communications cease to be isolated but can be joined together to create a synergy. Though this social phenomenon can happen randomly without intervention,

accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-01-19/innovation-revolution>.

¹³² Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change.”

¹³³ Reinoud Leenders, and Steven Heydemann, “Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers,” *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (2012): 139-159.

¹³⁴ The American Presidency Project, “The President’s News Conference,” April 1, 1954, accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202>; Gerri Baum, “Social Media Strategies and The Domino Effect,” *Sociality Squared Blog*, January 26, 2017, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://blog.socialitysquared.com/social-media/social-media-strategies-domino-effect/>.

social media marketing experts use the domino effect concept to engineer effective strategies to coalesce social capital.¹³⁵

Gerri Baum, a marketing and communications professional, proposes in her blog titled “Social Media Strategies and the Domino Effect,” that there are six questions that address the creation of an effective social media strategy:

1. Who are the people that we want to reach?
2. Where and how do they consume information online?
3. How are we going to attract these individuals?
4. What do we want to happen?
5. What methods or platforms will work best to achieve our goal?
6. How will we measure the results?¹³⁶

Shivani Sinha in her article “Will There Be a Domino's Effect on Social Media?” counter argues effectively that the problem of Domino Effect Theory is that the user must be active online to view the websites and social media forums’ outputs. This might give the user more than enough time to think of the issue.¹³⁷ She mentioned this question: “What will the implications of this strategy be in the world of digital media?”¹³⁸ The effectiveness of this campaign remains to be seen, but the tactics used could have an

¹³⁵ David Hayes, “The Arab Spring: Protest, Power, Prospect,” Open Democracy, April 11, 2011, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/david-hayes/arab-springprotest-power-prospect>.

¹³⁶ Baum, “Social Media Strategies and The Domino Effect.”

¹³⁷ Shivani Sinha, “Will There be a Domino’s Effect on Social Media?,” Talent Zoo, accessed May 2, 2017, http://www.talentzoo.com/digital-pivot/blog_news.php?articleID=21477.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

overwhelming impact on the way big organizations publicize products to their consumers.¹³⁹

New technological domains inspired most organizations to have a strategy on social media using a valid theory to match their goals and touch their organizational vision. IS is one of the terrorist organization who focused on social media means to follow a mobilization and propaganda strategy using social media to recruit, fund, and coordinate its operations.

Summary

In this chapter, major concepts, theories, and studies have been reviewed in an attempt to generate a comprehensive and thorough discussion about social media, and its use during the Syrian Arab spring and the rising of IS. Reviewing these issues not only clarifies the general discussion of this thesis, but also serves as a theoretical base to the coming chapters. For those organizations that use SMNs as a means or tactic to recruit or disseminate propaganda, timing is essential. Posting at the correct times aids recruitment because it increases engagement with more potential followers.¹⁴⁰ Choosing the correct time to upload propaganda and messages or to ask followers to respond to something is also extremely vital. The efficacy of choosing the appropriate time varies because some issues are time sensitive.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Nathan Ellering, "What 16 Studies Say About The Best Times To Post On Social Media," *CoSchedule Blog*, April 13, 2016, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://coschedule.com/blog/best-times-to-post-on-social-media/>.

In 2011, Syrian protestors used social media successfully for the first time in its modern era as a vehicle to coordinate meetings with nations and countries of the world stage.¹⁴¹ This was achieved by uploading photos and videos that reflected a large number of peaceful protestors who were seeking reformation of the Syrian State. During the reign of the Al- Assad family (the Father “President Hafez” and the Son “President Bashar”), which started in 1971, the oppressed extreme Islamists in Syria abused the people’s peaceful revolution to transform it into a nucleus of IS emergence. It has been the dream of extreme Islamists since the Middle Ages to build an Islamic State in the World. The extreme Islamists determined that the most appropriate way to transform the peaceful demonstrations into riots and vandalism was through showing the brutal repressive acts of Syrian armed forces on the Syrian Sunni population. The Syrian military also committed atrocities against Sunni People, which the extremists then posted on social media. On the other side, IS spread its ideology and Islamic Sharia to followers. IS published its own videos to threaten its enemies and attract more Islamists to join it.

¹⁴¹ Evan LePage, “The Evolution of Social Media (2008-2013)~ An Infographic,” *Hootsuite*, November 28, 2013, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://blog.hootsuite.com/evolution-of-social-media-infographic/>.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This descriptive study seeks to determine how IS used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to radicalize peaceful protestors during Syria's Arab Spring in 2011 and create a foundation of tacit and explicit support from within the Syrian population. This chapter outlines the methodology of the present study; more specifically, this chapter presents the (1) research question and guiding sub-questions, (2) description of the instruments and sources used, (3) subjects of the present study, (4) data collection procedures, and finally (5) data analysis processes. The research for this thesis was conducted in the framework described in this chapter with the goal of finding trustworthy, authentic, and credible evidence for analysis.

Research Questions

As stated in chapter 1 and in the light of the literature presented in chapter 2, the present study seeks to answer the following primary research question: How did IS use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to radicalize peaceful protestors during Syria's Arab Spring in 2011 and create a foundation of tacit and explicit support that enabled them to evolve into a viable terrorist group that had global aspirations? The guiding sub-questions include:

1. What social media capabilities did the Islamic State develop and use between 2011 and 2014?
2. What subgroups of the Syrian population did the Islamic State target and why?

3. Did these subgroups of the Syrian population have increased access to Islamic State information?

The primary research question and the guiding sub-questions are illustrated in the vertical nesting diagram (Figure 3) and aligned with the topic, research problem, and the purpose of the research presented in chapter 1.

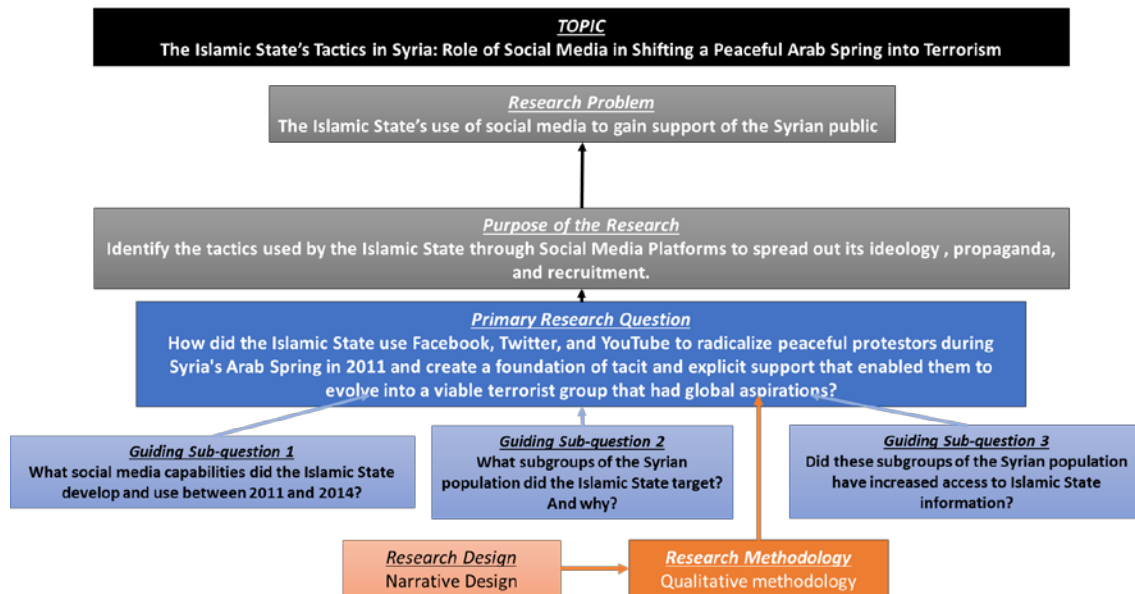


Figure 3. Vertical Nesting Diagram

Source: Created by Author.

Instruments and Sources of the Present Study

In this study, the topics used for collecting qualitative data include social media capabilities, the application of these capabilities by IS, which subgroups within the Syrian population had increased access to social media, and what subgroups IS targeted. These topics are directly linked to the guiding sub-questions. The sources used for the study are

a selection of United Nations and U.S. documents, books, magazine articles, newspapers, Internet websites, and open media that provide information about the IS's social media usage. Particularly relevant to the research are studies based on sampling and data from YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. These provided detailed and essential background information related to the study, which will facilitate the understanding of how the use of social media platforms lead to the rapid rise of IS.

Subjects of the Present Study

The subjects of the present study are social media users, mainly males who access social media through their mobile phones and laptops; mostly from the Syrian population who followed or shared the contents of social media platforms published by IS. The information collected on these subjects already exists and no generation or outside collection of external personal data is needed.

Data Collection Procedures

The study incorporates a mixed method approach consisting of both archival and statistical research. The data collection method used in this thesis is the document review method.¹⁴² The document review method is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents. The documents in this research were both internal and external to the IS and available both electronically and hard copy. The documents included review

¹⁴² ETA Evaluation Briefs, "Data Collection Methods for Evaluation: Document Review," January 2009, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief18.pdf>.

reports, monographs, scholarly articles, statistical information found in research reports, dissertations, media documentaries, interviews with experts, and newsletters.

Diverse and rich data already exists in the form of online articles that illustrates the effects of social media tools in helping IS to rise and spread rapidly. IS posted written messages and oral messages online through its magazines, TV, and radio, which revealed IS ideology and strategy to establish the Islamic Caliphate. Moreover, the IS videos posted on YouTube as well as Twitter photos supplied evidence for its social media capabilities, provided perspective on IS social media activities, and how IS used these platforms to perpetuate its philosophy in order to increase recruitment and support. It is important that this qualitative data have the characteristics of all research data, “truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality in order to be considered worthwhile.”¹⁴³ The data must also be reliable by meeting the following criteria: “Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.”¹⁴⁴

Data Analyses

The qualitative research design methodology used for this thesis is the narrative design. The narrative design is a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the inquiry process, a research method, and a model for representing the research study, which allows for the comprehensive interpretation of the facts and experiences addressed

¹⁴³ Janice M. Morse et al. “Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1, no. 2 (2002): 13-22, accessed January 13, 2017, https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

within the data. These experiences are structured and organized into meaningful units from the collected information.

The inductive approach used to analyze the data collected was the Framework Analysis, which is similar to both thematic analysis and content analysis.¹⁴⁵ Framework Analysis is used to discover similarities and variances within collected data that facilitates the formation of descriptive conclusions based on inferred thematic relationships.¹⁴⁶ Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer from the NetCen, an applied research agency in the UK, developed this approach in the 1980s.¹⁴⁷

Framework Analysis is a systematic process consisting of five steps. The first step is called Familiarization, which is the process of gaining understanding by collecting data from secondary sources. The second step is identifying a thematic framework by articulating themes that emerge. The third step is indexing or coding by selecting relevant evidence to answer the guiding sub-questions and the research question. The fourth step is summarizing the evidence within the thematic framework developed in step two.¹⁴⁸ The fifth step is mapping and interpretation, which involves making inferences from the

¹⁴⁵ Celia Taylor and Graham R. Gibbs, "What is Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)?," *Online QDA*, December 1, 2010, accessed March 30, 2017, http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php.

¹⁴⁶ Aashish Srivastava and S. Bruce Thomson, "Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research," *JQAAG* 4, no. 2 (2009):72-79, accessed April 27, 2017, http://research.apc.org/images/a/ad/Framework_analysis.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Nicola K. Gale et al., "Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research," NCBI Resources, September 18, 2013, accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3848812/>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

categorized evidence and identifying potential relationships that then is described in narrative form. Each of these steps was applied throughout the study as outlined in Figure 4.

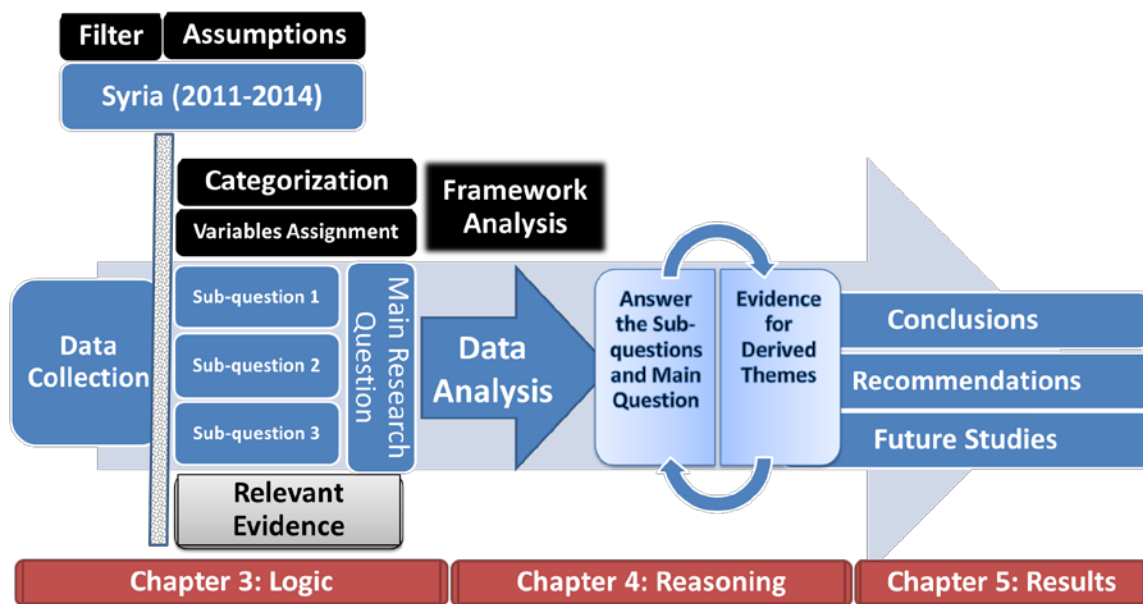


Figure 4. Research Procedure

Source: Created by Author.

The collected data in this study was categorized within the following three themes: The social media capabilities of IS, classification of the targeted Syrian population, and the usage of social media by the Syrian population in Syria.¹⁴⁹ These themes correspond to the guiding sub-questions, which will help to answer the research question and developing conclusions.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Organizational Capability analysis was used to analyze evidence associated with guiding sub-question one, determining IS's social media capabilities between 2011 and 2014. Organization's capabilities are all what an organization has to perform its tasks and publicize its products to match its goals. It is about having a value creating strategy. An organizational capability is determined by establishing that a group has the combination of (1) processes, (2) tools and systems, (3) knowledge, skills and behaviors, and (4) a campaign that allows an organization to deliver a specified outcome.¹⁵⁰ Although organizations may have many of capabilities, there are handful capabilities known as the differentiating capabilities, which are truly essential for the organization to develop its full potential, accomplish its tasks, and achieve its goals.¹⁵¹

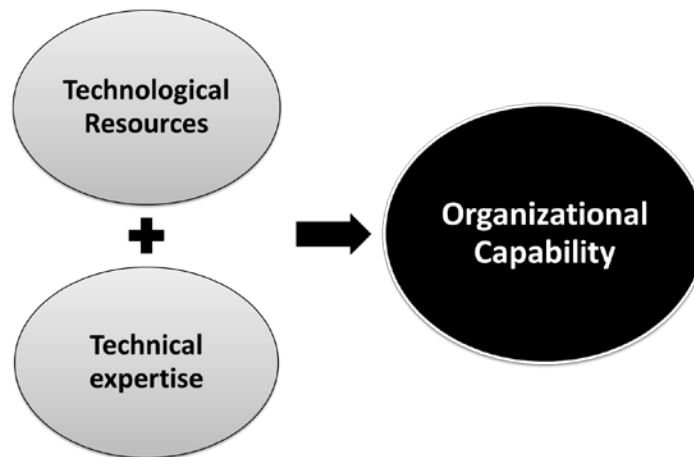


Figure 5. Organizational Capability

Source: Created by Author.

¹⁵⁰ Strategyandpwc, "What is a Capability," December 18, 2012, accessed May 2, 2017, https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/global/home/what-we-think/multimedia/video/mm-video_display/what-is-a-capability.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

In this thesis, IS's processes and campaign factors are fixed; the studied processes are limited to Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter platforms, besides IS's campaign is the informational domain who is launching the social media products. Technological resources (tools and systems) and technical expertise (knowledge, skills, and behaviors) as illustrated in Figure 5 can summarize the remaining two variable factors of organization's capabilities. This framework is used to derive IS's capabilities to perform specified tasks to recruit, create fear, fund, and coordinate and synchronize, and achieve established goals. Some of the evidence concerning IS's organizational capability occurred in 2015, which is outside the frame time of the study, but remain important because the operational capability of an organization accumulates over time.

The concept of having technical expertise in an organization is defined as having the ability to use technology.¹⁵² The development of the organizational technical expertise through technological capacity requires an investment of time and resources to establish a structure for the development and maintenance of this capacity.¹⁵³ The increase of this capability does not happen by chance but by evolving and changing the existing technology for the development of technological capability.¹⁵⁴ In other words,

¹⁵² Allan N. Afuah, "Mapping technological capabilities into product markets and competitive advantage," *Strategic Management Journal* 23, no. 2 (2002): 171-179, accessed May 2, 2017, https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/34614/221_ftp.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹⁵³ Yung-Ching Ho, Hui-Chen Fang, and Jing-Fu Lin, "Technological and design capabilities: Is ambidexterity possible?," *Management Decision* 49, no. 2 (2011): 208-225.

¹⁵⁴ Thevarkalathil R. Madanmohan, Uma Kumar, and Vinod Kumar, "Import-led technological capability: A comparative analysis of Indian and Indonesian manufacturing firms," *Technovation* 24, no. 12 (2004): 979-993.

technological capacity is the ability of an organization to modify its technological techniques and skills as technology evolves.¹⁵⁵

Summary

It is important to examine and understand how IS used social media platforms to expand its influence worldwide beginning from within the Syrian Arab Spring, and the response of the Syrian population with respect to IS's expansion. The narrative as a unit of analysis provides the means for doing this and the results can be used as thought-provoking tools and recommendations within the field of military doctrine and training, as well as provide awareness of social media effects in the cyber domain.¹⁵⁶

Table 3. Overview of the applied research design

Research questions	One main research question and 3 sub-questions
Instruments and sources used	Secondary sources
Subjects of the study	Main social media platform used by IS
Research Methodology	Qualitative Research Methodology
Research Design	Narrative Descriptive Design
Data Collection	Document Review Method
Data Analysis	Framework Analysis/ Inductive Approach/ Organizational Capacity Formulation

Source: Created by Author.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Torill Moen, "Reflections on the Narrative Research Approach," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 4 (December 2006): 56-69, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940690600500405>.

The information gathered was analyzed using the framework provided by the instruments of social media. The results of the analysis are then used to determine if and how social media contributed to the rise of IS in Syria. The study provides answers to the main and the guiding research questions (Table 3). The Domino Effect Theory matched perfectly the primary research question and the sub-questions as illustrated in Figure 6.

By creating and implementing a comprehensive strategy for the organization that contains well-defined goals and objectives backed by solid tactics and measurements.¹⁵⁷

It can leverage the power of a chain-like reaction that has the greatest potential to help an organization to meet and surpass its social media endeavors.¹⁵⁸

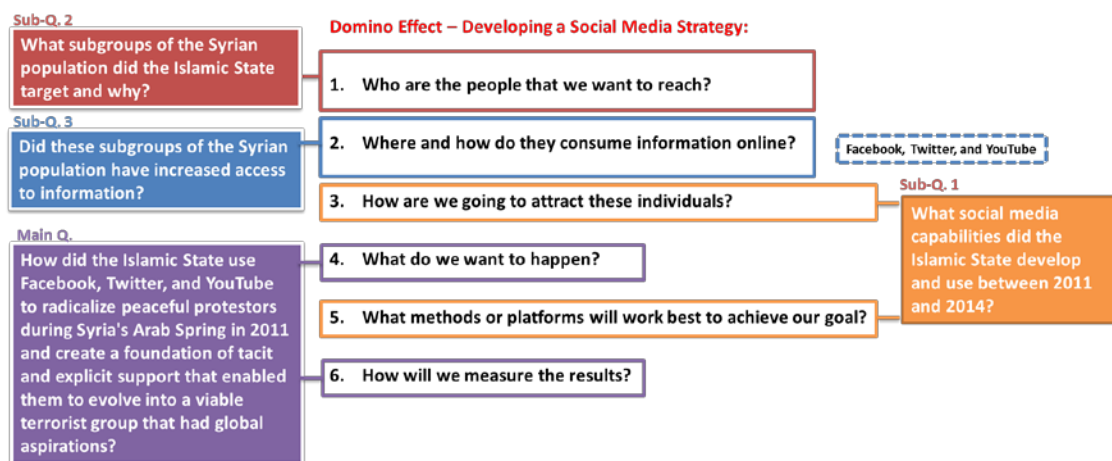


Figure 6. Relation between Domino Effect Theory and the Research Questions

Source: Created by Author based on the questions of Gerri Baum, “Social Media Strategies and The Domino Effect,” *Sociality Squared Blog*, January 26, 2017, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://blog.socialitysquared.com/social-media/social-media-strategies-domino-effect/>.

¹⁵⁷ Baum, “Social Media Strategies and The Domino Effect.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Unlike in the past when the processes of mobilization, manpower recruitment and training mainly took place in the physical realm, today the Internet has become a central and anonymous arena in which these activities take place.¹⁵⁹

— Homeland Security Institute, April 2009.

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the present study and is subdivided into four sections. The first section presents the evidence concerning what social media capabilities IS developed and used between 2011 and 2014 to target specific populations within Syria. The second section details the specific subgroup within the Syrian population that IS targeted for recruitment and propaganda distribution. The third portion reports how the targeted group had increased access to IS social media platforms. Finally, the fourth section covers IS's use of social media in Syria to gain the support of the Syrian people evolved in the Arab Spring, which enabled IS to evolve into a reorganized terrorist group.

First Guiding Research Question

The first guiding question of this thesis addresses the social media capabilities that IS developed and used to establish a foothold in Syria. Social media was essential to IS's rise between 2011 and 2014. It enabled IS militants to be first among equal terror

¹⁵⁹ Homeland Security Institute, "The Internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment and Radicalization of Youth," April 24, 2009, accessed April 28, 2017, http://www.homelandsecurity.org/docs/reports/Internet_Radicalization.pdf.

groups acting in Syria. It served to coordinate troops in battles, facilitated governance in its area of control, and act far beyond its physical territories. The posted hi-tech videos of group and individual execution of victims blasted across the social media platforms through an offensive hacking capability using imitated Twitter accounts. Moreover, it showed an advanced capability to humanize its fighters and recruit more people of both genders using online magazines, televisions, and radios.

Twitter Application: “Fajr al-Bashaer”

IS executes a portion of its psychological warfare campaign using Twitter because it offers the capability for users to tweet and retweet automatically by using keywords and hashtags. In April 2014, IS tweeters began using an Arabic-language Twitter application called “Fajr al-Bashaer,” or “The Dawn of Glad Tidings” (@Fajr991).¹⁶⁰ The application is an official IS product promoted by its top users. Hundreds of users have subscribed to the application through either the Internet or the Google Play store on their Android smartphones.¹⁶¹ The application sends junk emails to “Fajr al-Bashaer” followers. Twitter subsequently flags the emails as “potentially harmful” and proceeds to request user data and personal information from the receiver (figure 7), which is then collected by the application. After downloading this information, the application begins

¹⁶⁰ J. M. Berger, “How ISIS Games Twitter.”

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

sending news and updates on Islamic State fighting in Syria and Iraq to those addresses.¹⁶²

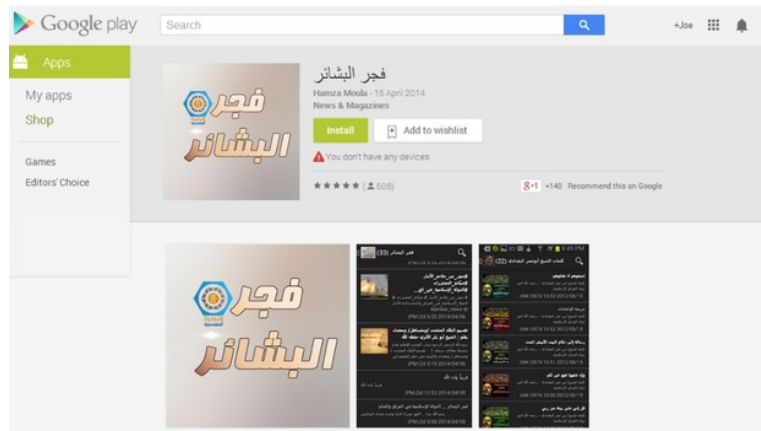


Figure 7. Screen Shot of Fajr al Bashaer

Source: ITV News, “Isis official app available to download on Google Play,” June 17, 2014, accessed January 8, 2017, <http://www.itv.com/news/2014-06-17/isiss-official-app-available-to-download-on-google-play/>.

In addition to sending updates on the fighting, IS also uses this capability to prove that they are able to govern the controlled areas in Syria. The photos distributed attempt to demonstrate that IS is responsible for restoring security. Twitter enabled IS to showcase their programs developed to build economic security in Syria, including tourism and distribution of financial aid. Most of the photographs posted to the Twitter feed show marketplaces with plenty of food, groceries, and vegetables as well as most of

¹⁶² Mustapha Ajbaili, “How ISIS conquered social media,” *Al Arabia English*, June 24, 2014, accessed January 20, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2014/06/24/How-has-ISIS-conquered-social-media-html>.

other living requirements.¹⁶³ IS also publishes photos of people defendant of committing various crimes being executed to illustrate the establishment of governance (Figure 8).

However, Twitter is not the preferred method to disseminate IS's violent media.



Figure 8. IS images spread through social media

Source: INFOSEC Institute, “The Role of Technology in Modern Terrorism,” February 3, 2016, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://resources.infosecinstitute.com/the-role-of-technology-in-modern-terrorism/#gref>.

IS used Twitter as a tacit platform to reach its followers, spread its message, and publicize its achievements. It is characterized by its quick spread through tweeting and retweeting IS's message all over the virtual globe.

¹⁶³ Daily Mail, “ISIS goes nuts for Nutella: Brutal Jihadists reveal bizarre soft spot for the chocolate hazelnut spread,” August 14, 2014, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2724889/ISIS-goes-nuts-Nutella-Brutal-Jihadists-reveal-bizarre-soft-spot-chocolate-hazelnut-spread.html>.

Video Production

YouTube is IS's primary technique to propagate its brutal tactics, which requires a significant video production capacity. These YouTube videos are filmed in documentary style and available in high definition and in multiple languages that are available by conducting simple searches on the internet (Figure 9). IS recruited skilled film crews and invested in Hollywood-caliber software to produce its videos. The videos portray violent executions by various means such as shooting, drowning, and being thrown off of buildings. The videos have a psychological impact on its viewers, who cannot help but tense up when watching the cruel acts depicted on screen. The tension can be classified as either excitement or fear. As such, the videos are used as both a recruitment tool and a terror tool.



Figure 9. IS Studio to make some “Executions”

Source: Leak Source, “Leaked Video Shows Making of Islamic State “Execution” in Studio — via CyberBerkut Hack of Sen. McCain Staffer,” July 11, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://leaksource.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/leaked-video-shows-making-of-islamic-state-execution-in-studio-via-cyberberkut-hack-of-sen-mccain-staffer/>.

IS taped and posted on social media platforms most of the mass executions of Syrian Army soldiers and other ethnical and religious executions in order to threaten and discourage their enemies who are fighting them. On May 14 and 16, 2013, IS posted two videos of the execution of Syrian soldiers in eastern Syria. In the first video, fighters of the IS shot dead three Syrians, one Army officer and two Alawite civilians, in the middle of Raqqa square.¹⁶⁴ The other video showed the execution of 11 Syrian Army soldiers in the eastern Deir al-Zor province.¹⁶⁵ Between July 27 and 30, 2013, IS killed between 50 and 70 residents in “Tell Aran” and “Tell Hassel” after they captured the Kurdish enclaves from the Kurdish Front.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, on August 28, 2014, IS militants massacred 250 of captured Syrian soldiers near Tabqa. The soldiers’ video, which was posted on YouTube, showed the prisoners stripped to their underwear and marched across the desert to be executed.¹⁶⁷ The videos are made to go extremely brutal using

¹⁶⁴ Salma Abdelaziz and Joe Sterling, “Execution video surfaces in Syria,” *CNN Regions*, May 16, 2013, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/15/world/meast/syria-civil-war>; Jill Reilly, “Executed as they waited on a pavement kerb: Terrifying assassination video of three men by 'Islamist rebels' shows new front in Syrian propaganda war,” *Daily Mail*, May 16, 2013, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2325461/Executed-waited-pavement-kerb-Terrifying-assassination-video-men-Islamist-rebels-shows-new-Syrian-propaganda-war.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Erika Solomon, “Video shows Islamist rebels executing 11 Syrian soldiers,” *Reuters*, May 16, 2013, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-executions-idUSBRE94F0AM20130516>.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, *Written statement submitted by Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, a nongovernmental organization on the roster*, Human Rights Council, September 10, 2013, accessed April 24, 2017, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1379586575_g1316865.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ Heather Saul, “YouTube video posted by Isis militants shows 'execution of 250 Syrian soldiers',” *Independent*, August 28, 2014, accessed April 24, 2017,

bizarre inhumane executions. They threatened bloodshed against any Muslims thinking in joining other Syrian rebel groups in Syria to fight IS.¹⁶⁸ This, in return, led to the reinforcement of IS rules in the area of control and showed the power of the organization to its followers for the ability to gain territories and executing the enemies in groups.

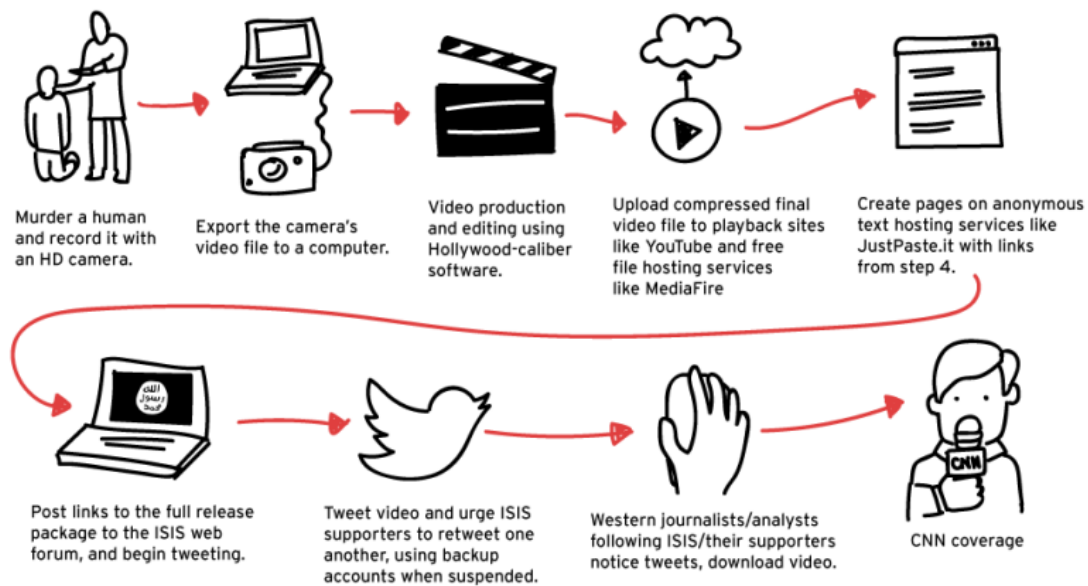


Figure 10. Flow line of IS's media productions

Source: Sam Biddle, "How ISIS Makes Its Blood Sausage," GAWKER, February 6, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://gawker.com/how-isis-makes-its-blood-sausage-1683769387>.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/youtube-video-posted-by-isis-militants-shows-execution-of-250-syrian-soldiers-9697532.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Alalam, "Horrific Video Shows ISIS Mass Execution of Militants Beheading Syrian Rebels + Pics," October 4, 2014, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1868806>.

The flow of IS's media productions is illustrated in Figure 10. It starts with capturing the murder of the victim with a professional crew, for group executions and celebrities like journalists and pilots, or with IS fighters. The executors download the taped video on someone's computer. Then, the process begins inside the IS's media office that has an art video production team. The video is edited, exported, and protected as a compressed file with a strong 34-character password.¹⁶⁹ The video goes in two directions, directed by the "logistics team" of IS's media production office. First, the team uploads the video to a number of free, anonymous hosting services like YouTube, Vimeo, Daily Motion, and Archive.org. Second, the team publishes the links on anonymous text sites or Arabic-centric services.¹⁷⁰ Once the video is released, it is coupled with a download link. The linked pages are shared as an "invite-only" and password-protected through a closed-registration message board to IS fighters and leaders.¹⁷¹ At the same time, these downloads are tweeted on Twitter, which is the most vital part of the entire IS media operation for a rapid and wide spread of the publication. A number of IS's followers are actually analysts and journalists who download the video on their part, and help indirectly IS to jump with the video from Twitter to international media channels for a wider spread for the video.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Sam Biddle, "How ISIS Makes Its Blood Sausage," GAWKER, February 6, 2015, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://gawker.com/how-isis-makes-its-blood-sausage-1683769387>.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

The execution of a Jordanian pilot, named Maaz Kasabeh, showcases the professionalism of IS's production capability in terms of filming. The camera operators demonstrated their technical proficiency by how they choreographed the scenes. By using proper placement of the subjects and appropriate camera angles, the cameramen are able to evoke significant emotions. This is apparent in the section of the video that shows the pilot's face from dramatic viewpoints, which attempts to convince the viewer that the pilot is remorseful for his bombardment of areas in Syria that also appear in the video. Despite the fact that the pilot may have been drugged or tortured prior to the filming, viewers are unable to tell what caused the pilot to act in this way to give this dramatic and penitent impression but are convinced of the veracity none the less.¹⁷³ An IS follower commented about the Jordanian pilot video on twitter stating, "IS wants the heedless people about Islamic religion to wake up to IS voices and understand the moral of its goals well."¹⁷⁴

In addition to the high-end camera work, editing plays a significant role in successfully propagating IS's message on YouTube. The recruitment of trained producers and the investment in Hollywood-caliber software improves the editing quality. This is evident when viewing the transition scenes in the Maaz Kasabeh video. To achieve this dramatic transition, the section requires two layers of editing between the scenes. The end

¹⁷³ Fox Nation, "New ISIS Video Shows Jordanian Pilot Being Burned Alive," February 3, 2015, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://nation.foxnews.com/2015/02/03/new-isis-video-purportedly-shows-jordanian-pilot-being-burned-alive>.

¹⁷⁴ Nico Prucha, "Is this the most successful release of a jihadist video ever?," Jihadica: Documenting the Global Jihad, May 19, 2014, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/is-this-the-most-successful-release-of-a-jihadist-video-ever/>.

of the first scene is overlapped with the beginning of the second scene, which is a difficult process. Innovative visual effects are also used to increase dramatic results. Editing expertise is observable in the creation of IS montages, which are comparable to high-tech professional films. “In filmmaking, a montage is an editing technique in which shots are juxtaposed in an often fast-paced fashion that compresses time and conveys a lot of information in a relatively short period.”¹⁷⁵ The information conveyed is violent in nature and meant to rouse or agitate the viewer. The producers and editors exclusively commission narrators with British accents in an attempt to manipulate its viewers. In the film industry, narrators are known as the “voice of god.”¹⁷⁶ The voice-over is an influential force because it states unquestionable truths. British narrators are considered most desirable because the voice is believed to belong to a person that is high class, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. The addition of this kind of voice to an IS documentary adds perceived legitimacy to the video.¹⁷⁷

IS’s production team also uses sound as a means to arouse emotion. IS produced a short film named *Fateh Baghdad Sulil al-Sowarm*, which means “Screech for Invading

¹⁷⁵ Elements of Cinema, “Montage,” accessed April 24, 2017, <http://elementsofcinema.com/editing/montage.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Elements of Cinema, “Documentary Filmmaking,” accessed April 24, 2017, http://elementsofcinema.com/film_form/documentary_filmaking.html.

¹⁷⁷ Emily Gaudette, “Power Ranking the Best Science Documentary Narrators of All Time,” *Inverse*, January 13, 2016, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.inverse.com/article/10137-power-ranking-the-best-science-documentary-narrators-of-all-time>; Voices, “Documenting the World Around Us,” accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.voices.com/resources/voice-over/documentary-voice-over>.

Baghdad,” that used the sound effects from the American movie *Kingdom of Heaven*.¹⁷⁸ This film proposes that Al-Baghdadi is comparable to the historical leader Saladin, who was the first sultan of Egypt and Syria.¹⁷⁹ The subject draws on the emotions of viewers who respect Saladin’s legacy. The poignant subject matter is intensified by the inspiring music. The intention of these videos, is to attract both people who support or in opposition to IS. There are some people who want to watch the short film and discuss the technological aspects used by the film-makers rather than for the brutality presented. Alternatively, others, that are not violent themselves, are attracted by this type of display of cruelty and violence.

Offensive Hacking

IS began amassing a significant cyber warfare capacity in 2014. IS Hacking Division, also known as the Cyber Caliphate, officially launched in 2014 when it published recruitment ads on extremist internet sites.¹⁸⁰ The Cyber Caliphate has the ability to breach other networks defenses by exploiting network or computer program weaknesses. IS’s cyber-soldiers are as important as the IS’s ground forces, and were trained by Junaid Hussein, who was recruited from England to teach IS hackers how to

¹⁷⁸ National Center for Research and Opinion Poll, “Daesh... Media and Octopus Killer,” August 31, 2015, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://ncro.sy/?p=2575>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Halleck, “Junaid Hussain: CyberCaliphate Leader And ISIS Member Was Behind CENTCOM Hack, Report Says,” *IBTimes*, January 13, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.com/junaid-hussain-cybercaliphate-leader-isis-member-was-behind-centcom-hack-report-says-1782870>.

conduct cyber warfare.¹⁸¹ In England, Junaid Hussein, under the handle “Trick,” was sent to prison in 2012 for hacking Prime Minister Tony Blair’s computer, acquiring his address book and subsequently divulging the information over the internet.¹⁸² Following his release from prison, he fled to Raqqa, Syria to join IS.¹⁸³ Now known as “Abo Hussain Al-Britani,” which means “the British Abo Hussain,” Junaid Hussein became a prominent leader within the organization, the head of the Cyber Caliphate, and a celebrity.¹⁸⁴

After IS’s declaration in September 2014 to create a Cyber Caliphate, it took until January 2015 to evidence IS’s cyber-attacks in hacking websites and posting extremist

¹⁸¹ Emma Graham-Harrison, “Could Isis’s ‘cyber caliphate’ unleash a deadly attack on key targets?,” *The Guardian*, April 12, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/12/isis-cyber-caliphate-hacking-technology-arms-race>.

¹⁸² Spencer Ackerman, Ewen MacAskillin, and Alice Ross, “Junaid Hussain: British hacker for Isis believed killed in US air strike,” *The Guardian*, August 27, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/27/junaid-hussain-british-hacker-for-isis-believed-killed-in-us-airstrike>; Lorraine Murphy, “The Curious Case Of The Jihadist Who Started Out As A Hacktivist,” *Vanity Fair*, December 15, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/12/isis-hacker-junaid-hussain>.

¹⁸³ Jack Moore, “Junaid Hussain: How A Boy From Birmingham Became Isis's Leading Hacker,” *Europe Newsweek*, August 27, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://europe.newsweek.com/junaid-hussain-how-boy-birmingham-became-isis-leading-hacker-332108>; Brett Gibbons, “Birmingham hacker Junaid Hussain among Brits fighting in Syria,” *Birmingham Mail*, June 19, 2014, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-hacker-junaid-hussain-syria-7291864>.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Szoldra, “Inside the hacker underworld of ISIS,” *Business Insider*, June 16, 2016, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/isis-hacking-division-operates-2016-6>; Thomas Halleck, “Junaid Hussain: CyberCaliphate Leader and ISIS Member Was Behind CENTCOM Hack, Report Says.”

propaganda on defaced websites.¹⁸⁵ The group launched itself into the spotlight timing its attack on the Twitter and YouTube account of US Central Command (CENTCOM) with President Barack Obama's cyber security speech on January 12, 2015.¹⁸⁶ Cyber Caliphate also hacked the Twitter handle of *Newsweek*, the *International Business Times*, two local US news stations, *Charlie Hebdo* French magazine, and 19,000 French websites.¹⁸⁷ Another capability was shown in December 2014 when IS hackers conducted a spear-phishing attack against a Syrian group, named "al-Raqqah is being Slaughtered Silently" (RSS), that posts IS's abuse of the human rights in the city of al-Raqqah. IS unmasked the group's location and posted messages negating the group's focus.¹⁸⁸

There is an argument between cyber experts that some of the defaced pages and cyber-attacks are not the work of IS Cyber Caliphate. Experts argue that Anonymous used the name of IS to gain media attention and magnify fear.¹⁸⁹ Yet, there is an agreement that these cyber-soldiers of IS use their knowledge and electronic expertise to fight fierce wars no less ferocious than those run by armed vehicles and artillery. The

¹⁸⁵ The Recorded Future Blog, "Cyber Caliphate: ISIS Plays Offense on the Web," April 2, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.recordedfuture.com/cyber-caliphate-analysis/>.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

goal is to manipulate social media to facilitate recruitment and funding while also showing their capacity to project power beyond Syria.¹⁹⁰

Synchronization and Coordination

For IS, Twitter is a critical means of social communication, which terrorists use for interaction and coordination. It provides virtual communities that are composed spontaneously during major events, which would benefit those groups by following up the latest information about any issue that appears in the public domain. The group has exhorted its followers to strip from their tweets and other social-media posts any information that might give away the geographic location from which the message sent to protect themselves from IS opponents' cyber technology.¹⁹¹

IS has increased its ability to coordinate operations under the radar of its enemies, keeping its electronic communications hidden. IS's use of cyber experts to stay several steps ahead of law enforcement. IS recruited communication experts. They teach terrorists how to use encryption and communication platforms like Silent Circle, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Aaron F. Brantly and his colleagues at the U.S. Army-affiliated Combating Terrorism Center have found that IS uses 120 platforms, mostly

¹⁹⁰ Emma Graham-Harrison, "Could Isis's 'cyber caliphate' unleash a deadly attack on key targets?"

¹⁹¹ Noah Shachtman and Shane Harris, "ISIS Keeps Getting Better at Dodging U.S. Spies," *Daily Beast*, November 14, 2014, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/13/isis-keeps-getting-better-at-dodging-u-s-spies>.

encrypted, to communicate and share information between its cells. Telegram is the most highly encrypted form of IS's communication.¹⁹²

Telegram, a non-profit, social media messaging site that cannot be spied upon. It can deliver fast messages that are totally secure, can self-destruct, and can be used on multiple devices. The founders of Telegram, Pavel and Nikolai Durov, argue that site and user's privacy is more important than fear of terrorism.¹⁹³ IS has always used whatever communication platforms are available as soon as they become available.¹⁹⁴ IS has proven exceptionally difficult to track and kill because of encrypting its communications and taking steps to avoid being detected by U.S. surveillance, especially communications at the top of the organization.¹⁹⁵

IS use multiplayer on-line games like *World of Warcraft* for meetups. It uses gaming consoles like PlayStation 4 to converse and communicate with each other.¹⁹⁶ IS spells out its attack plans with its cells. There are many ways IS could communicate through the gaming console. PS4 users can send messages through the PlayStation

¹⁹² Josh Meyer, "Are ISIS Geeks Using Phone Apps, Encryption to Spread Terror?," *NBC News*, November 16, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-terror-attacks/are-isis-geeks-using-phone-apps-encryption-spread-terror-n464131>.

¹⁹³ Todd Wood, "ISIS Now has Spy Free Communications," *The Washington Times*, November 7, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/7/isis-now-has-spy-free-communications/>.

¹⁹⁴ Meyer, "Are ISIS Geeks Using Phone Apps, Encryption to Spread Terror?"

¹⁹⁵ Shachtman and Harris, "ISIS Keeps Getting Better at Dodging U.S. Spies."

¹⁹⁶ Meyer, "Are ISIS Geeks Using Phone Apps, Encryption to Spread Terror?"

Network online gaming service, use voice chatting or even communicate through a specific game.¹⁹⁷

“DABIQ”: Online Magazine

“DABIQ” is a monthly online magazine of high quality, issued in different languages, which covers the building of IS as an organization and its insight. It talks about the “World War” against it through the coalition strikes led by USA, the Russian strikes, and the conspiracy hatched against it from some Arab countries. It also publishes articles of some Arab intellectuals and foreigners who belong to IS that made it one of the heavy intellectual productions of the organization. It discusses the extreme Islamic thoughts, ideology, faith, and the importance of jihad in its fields: by money, by hands, and by tongues. It covers how to execute a person and make bombs and describes the Western society’s mentality and relative contradictions to Islam in their view. It believes in the collapse of the “American Empire” which is ruling the world. IS recruited economists who write articles about economic analyses of the organization and some regional countries. IS visualizes a culture distinct from the Islamic culture. It spreads the culture of what is called “radical Islam” as a culture of atonement, brutality of offenders, and the legalization of bloody attacks to rule and spread the State. In general, the

¹⁹⁷ Morgan Winsor, “Is ISIS Using PlayStation 4 to Communicate? Islamic State Could Use PS4 to Spell Out Attack Plans,” *International Business Times*, November 14, 2015, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-using-playstation-4-communicate-islamic-state-could-use-ps4-spell-out-attack-2185042>.

magazine encourages people who read it to join the Islamic State in the way they show itself as the right destination to follow and meet God in the proper way.¹⁹⁸

Radio and Television

IS launched the State Radio “al-Bayan,” which means “the declaration,” in Iraq and Syria in early 2015. It broadcasts al-Baghdadi speeches and vocal newsletters that contain the local news of the organization in Syria and Iraq. In addition, it covers IS’s battle achievements in its perspectives in addition to the “World War” against them. IS also launched a television channel in early 2015 called “Caliphate Channel,” which broadcasts over the Internet, focusing on encouraging the Muslims to join the organization. It also tries to convince viewers that this is the right time for joining IS, broadcasting the program of recruitment, locations to recruit, and recruiting advertisements.¹⁹⁹ Online radio and online television made IS reaches wider audiences, especially who prefer to get information through audio and visual instruments rather than other texting tools of social media.

¹⁹⁸ The Clarion Project, “The Islamic State’s (ISIS, ISIL) Magazine,” September 10, 2014, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq>.

¹⁹⁹ Adam Withnall, “Isis to launch first 24-hour online TV channel featuring British hostage John Cantlie and flagship show 'Time to Recruit',” *Independent*, April 2015, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-to-launch-first-24-hour-online-tv-channel-featuring-british-hostage-john-cantlie-and-flagship-9986254.html>.

Sexual violence

IS uses sexual violence as a tactic to increase the returns of its field achievements and inflate the base to recruit followers, as well as destroying the social unity of the communities targeted. They displayed women as sexual slaves as a strategic pull factor in attracting men, including local youths and foreign fighters, to join the organization. The organization describes the captivity and enslavement of women and children “infidels” as an expected result of the invasion of new lands and pursues to legalize sexual slavery. This develops the justification explicit of sexual slavery in their perspective. Trafficking of women and children is an essential component of financial flows to IS, as it continues to exploit social media platforms to extort money by trafficking and selling of women.²⁰⁰

The innovative applications of social media platforms, such as the use of private instant encrypted messaging applications, allowed the organization of IS to sell women and girls in the auctions on the Internet.²⁰¹ In addition, the posted picture of women dressed in traditional Islamic dress holding weapons next to luxury vehicles has proved proactive and enticing to both young men and women to join the organization. IS’s leaders believe that this leads to recruiting more females which will result in more families and a more socially stable Islamic State.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ United Nations, *Second UN report on ISIL*, Voltairenet, May 31, 2016, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.voltairenet.org/article192133.html>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Walsh, “As ISIS’ Social Media Tactics Prompt Changes in U.S. Counter-Terror Strategies, We Should Be Educating Our Student.”

Humanize the IS Soldiers

IS used social media platforms as a means to humanize its followers. It showed scenes of soldiers visiting their wounded peers in the hospitals, which reflected the comfort of the injured soldiers. In addition, the videos showed IS fighters handing out candy and ice cream to children who smile at the fighters. It organized, imaged, and displayed entertainment for children and elderly people in Aleppo and Raqqa. The organization installed “media points” kiosks as informational points. The kiosks distributed all publications of the of the organization for free as a replacement of the social media, and announced specific times so people can gather and watch on TV its media publications in areas near the kiosks.²⁰³

Funding and Moral Support

IS are active users of popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram for financing and fundraising. It utilized social media to attract and direct funding to buy weapons, pay salaries, improve infrastructure and operate civil and social services in the areas of control. IS has relied on some of the fatwas from some preachers who tweeted on Twitter for the sacrifice of money and souls (Figures 11-12).²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Steven Stalinsky and R. Sosnow, “The Islamic State (ISIS) Establishes ‘Media Points’ In Syria, Iraq, Libya To Indoctrinate Caliphate Citizens And Enhance Its Cyber Activities On The Ground: A One-Year Review,” Memri Cyber and Jihad Lab, October 13, 2015, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://cjlabs.memri.org/analysis-and-special-reports/the-islamic-state-isis-establishes-media-points-in-syria-iraq-libya-to-indoctrinate-caliphate-citizens-and-enhance-its-cyber-activities-on-the-ground-a-one-year-review-2/>.

²⁰⁴ The Camstoll Group, “Use of social media by terrorist Fundraisers and Financiers,” April 2016, accessed March 4, 2017, <https://www.camstoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Social-Media-Report-4.22.16.pdf>.



Figure 11. IS call for Jihad “Fight the unbelievers in your money, hands, and tongues”

Source: MEMRI Cyber and Jihad Lab, *ISIS Supporters Launch Campaign To Boost Morale And Rejuvenate Online Activities, Stress That Online Operations Are A Form Of Jihad, Note That Facebook, Twitter, YouTube Are Important Battlefields*, May 17, 2016, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://cjlaboratory.org/lab-projects/tracking-jihadi-terrorist-use-of-social-media/isis-supporters-launch-campaign-to-boost-morale-and-rejuvenate-online-activities-stress-that-online-operations-are-a-form-of-jihad-note-that-facebook-twitter-are-important-battlefields/>.



Figure 12. IS campaign. “Equip Us”

Source: MEMRI Cyber and Jihad Lab, *Gaza-Based Pro-ISIS Group Kicks Off Annual Social Media Fundraising Campaign*, June 24, 2016, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://cjlab.memri.org/lab-projects/tracking-jihadi-terrorist-use-of-social-media/gaza-based-pro-isis-group-kicks-off-annual-social-media-fundraising-campaign/>.

In addition to financial support, IS got moral support from social networking sites. Some web pages have seen what is called the virtual allegiance. After IS leader came in the wake of the declaration of the establishment of “Caliphate State,” it featured pages on social networks, including “allegiance of the faithful Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,” “Forensic Alliance of the faithful Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Advertising” and others. These pages played a role in the spread of the organization and the expansion of its supporters across the virtual world.

The analysis of the first research sub-question, using the Organizational Capability Analysis, achieved its goals to derive IS’s capabilities to accomplish tasks of recruit, fund organization, create fear, and coordinate its activities using social media platforms. Each of the derived capability proved that IS had both the required tools and

systems found in its technological resources to spread its message, and the knowledge, skills, and behaviors through its technical expertise in various domains of social media. All this will guide the research to answer the primary research question and lead to reasonable conclusions for chapter 5.

Second Guiding Research Question

Between 2006 and 2011, a catastrophic drought overwhelmed the Middle East, including Syria. 800,000 Syrians lost their jobs and approximately 3 million Syrians became impoverished. In the northeastern portion of Syria, which is ethnically mixed, 75 percent of the farm crops failed and herders lost almost 85 percent of their cattle.²⁰⁵ This resulted in over 1.5 million people moving to temporary camps around Aleppo, Damascus, and Daraa.²⁰⁶ These temporary camps lacked running water and electricity.²⁰⁷ The Syrian government failed to address the concerns of these displaced people. This dire situation made the affected people a vulnerable target audience for any movement that promised to improve living standards.

IS targeted the Syrian population and used social media as a part of its recruitment procedure to encourage new followers and fighters to join its ranks. The targeted

²⁰⁵ Anshul Bajaj, "The Success or Failure of Arab Spring in International Politics," Academia Saga Accounting, December 2014, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/9623354/The_Success_or_Failure_of_Arab_Spring_in_International_Politics.

²⁰⁶ Nodira Akhmedkhodjaeva, "Drought in Syria," The Aleppo Project, July 2015, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.thealeppoproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Drought-in-Syria-HD.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

population can be categorized into three groups. The first group was the Syrian extreme Islamists who share the same religious ideology of the Islamic Caliphate. The second group was the majority of people, primarily Sunni youths and poor people, to get their support and win the public opinion in order to assert influence on wider community. It was a support that resulted from either fear and terrorism or the need of power to defeat the Syrian regime. The third group was the armed people of other rebel groups that were already in Syria and fighting the regime. By that, after having the sharia of caliphate posted on social media to rule, the recruited population through social media platforms to support and follow the rules, and a recruited army who can fight for IS as “bakia wa tatamadad” which means “everlasting and expandable” IS became Clausewitz follower in his trinity: government, people, and army through social media ways of war.²⁰⁸

Syrian Islamists

Syrian extreme Islamists were the first supporters of IS who saw in it the power and will to achieve their goals through the organization’s ideology and achievements on the battlefield. The short-term goal of IS and extreme Islamists was to get rid of the Syrian regime, and the long-term goal was establishing the Islamic Caliphate. Extreme Islamist dream may come true. Not only that, they might also take advanced ranks in the organization. IS focused its information programs to get youths to join for they can fight with the organization. IS skillfully used its powerful religious ideology to convince these Islamists of all ages to leave other rebel groups and join the organization. IS publications

²⁰⁸ Christopher Bassford, “Teaching the Clausewitzian Trinity,” Clausewitz.com, January 2003, accessed May 10, 2017, <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/TrinityTeachingNote.htm>.

on social media typically use out-of-context or out-of-period quotes from the holy book Qur'an as an alluring religious attraction such as Jihad for God's sake as obligatory, and the true presence of living is in "al-Janna" which means Paradise.²⁰⁹ Journalist Lydia Wilson interviewed in 2015 with prisoners who joined IS, and concluded that many recruits were miserably unfamiliar about Islam and Islamic Sharia. They barely knew the fundamentals and principles of Islam. Several recruits have their own understanding of Islam rather than the one IS offered. These recruits, she concluded, joined IS not only to fight for IS shocking dream, but for other reasons like gaining money, power, and sexual relationships.²¹⁰

Syrian Population

IS focused its social media capabilities on the Sunni population in Syria. It used the aggressiveness of the Syrian regime against the population of Sunni majority. Shia military organization coming from abroad like Iraqi militias and Hezbollah from Lebanon, IS claimed, are supporting the Alawi regime. This aroused the religious background of young Sunni Syrians, who are jobless and have low standards of living, to join who calls for the Islamic Sunni rights and Sharia law. Some of the Syrian population saw on social media platforms that IS was the first force to promise to get rid of the uncertain and shameful life such as being loyal to rulers under civilian laws and propose

²⁰⁹ Gibril F. Haddad, "Mas'alat al-Qubur – About Graves," As-Sunnah Foundation of America, 2016, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://sunnah.org/wp/2015/07/26/masalat-al-qubur-about-graves/>.

²¹⁰ Lydia Wilson, "What I Discovered From Interviewing Imprisoned ISIS Fighters," *The Nation*, October 21, 2015, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-i-discovered-from-interviewing-isis-prisoners/>.

a route to a brilliant environment for Sunnis. It is an expression of religious identity, culture, and tribe regulations. The access to the organization, the financial benefits, and the social services attracts some Syrians.²¹¹ Some of the Syrians consider what is happening in Syria as an adventure that is good to experience. These recruits are considered dangerous, because they might go to extreme actions for the sake of their adventure.

IS has a long-term strategy of recruitment to create and support the theocratic empire it seeks to establish. So IS has tried to show that the world of radical Islam is not just death and demolitions, but that it is a supportive organization. IS offered complete installations of social service networks in the areas it rules. It pays good salaries, and tries to provide an acceptable social atmosphere to facilitate the living in its areas.²¹² According to Thomas Hegghammer of the *New York Times*, IS strives to offer its supporters a rich cultural space in which they can entertain themselves, including music, poetry, and even dream explanation. In addition to the Muslim culture, the IS fighters have put a radical ideological flavor on it, composing their own ideological songs about their preferred themes, such as “My Ummah, Dawn Has Appeared” song.²¹³

²¹¹ John Graham, “Who Joins ISIS and Why?,” *The World Post*, December 29, 2015, accessed January 17, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-graham/who-joins-isis-and-why_b_8881810.html.

²¹² John Graham, “Who Joins ISIS and Why?”

²¹³ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Soft Power of Militant Jihad,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2015, accessed January 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/opinion/sunday/militant-jihads-softer-side.html?_r=0.

Armed Syrian Population

Many of the experienced retired Sunni soldiers and officers of the Syrian Army, who have had trouble earning a living, were happy to join IS. By joining it gave them employment, a renewed sense of honor, and a way to continue their fight against Shia Muslims and the Baathist party who rule the army. These veterans have provided IS with seasoned military and organizational expertise. They saw the shift from a retired person seeking to work for living to a zone commander ruling their local area. Social media platforms offered them a good medium to communicate with the organization to prepare meetings in mosques and join processes for local recruitments.

IS worked hard on social media to encourage those who joined the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to join them. It used the intimation and coaxing methods on the Free Army followers. The rigid ideology that is part of IS propaganda on social media attracted the rebels to join it. Others were attracted by the money. Others saw that they have the power to put an end to the Syrian regime. The brutality shown on social media towards people against IS made the rebels fear the organization and forced them to join the organization to save their lives.

The analysis of the second research sub-question focused on recruiting manpower to build an organization. IS built its manpower mainly from the Syrian populations to have a tacit and explicit foundation to order to initiate the promised Islamic Caliphate. The first guiding sub-question showed that IS has capabilities in using social media to influence people to join the organization, or in worst case scenario, to make them neutral and to refrain from fighting IS. The three sub-groups of the Syrian populations showed some similar interests and other distinct interests in joining IS. In addition to guiding sub-

question one, sub-question two, which focuses on IS's supporters and followers, also guides also the research to answer the primary research question and lead to rational conclusions for chapter 5.

Third Guiding Research Question

The third guiding question of this thesis addresses whether the subgroups of the Syrian population had increased access to IS information or not. It is evident that there was an increase of social media users who followed IS social media platform from 2011 till 2014. Internet users in most countries of the world have increased access to social media to learn about what is happening in Syria. Thus they have the ability, if they want to investigate what IS is, and what propaganda it issues. They could have accessed IS information through YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook mainly. Some people who accessed the social media platforms vary from followers to supporters to neutral people and to opposers of IS. Mainly, any brutal published video from IS has a shocking increasing number of followers; essentially from Arab countries. It is evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of viewers of the brutal videos on YouTube. What follows is a personal example about people Syrian refugees in Lebanon, when somebody hears that a brutal video or a song that is published from IS, he/she directly goes to YouTube to watch it before Youtube deleted it. Even people who are strongly against IS ideology watch the videos.

Table 4. Social Media Statistics in Syria

Year	Internet Users**	Penetration (percent of Pop)	Total Population	Non-Users (Internetless)	1Y User Change	1Y User Change	Population Change
2016	5,502,250	29.6 %	18,563,595	13,061,345	2 %	106,142	0.33 %
2015	5,396,107	29.2 %	18,502,413	13,106,306	2.3 %	122,917	-1.44 %
2014	5,273,190	28.1 %	18,772,481	13,499,291	4.2 %	210,671	-2.85 %
2013	5,062,519	26.2 %	19,322,593	14,260,074	4.3 %	207,662	-3.28 %
2012	4,854,858	24.3 %	19,978,756	15,123,898	5.2 %	242,095	-2.55 %
2011	4,612,763	22.5 %	20,501,167	15,888,404	7.5 %	323,598	-1.06 %
2010	4,289,165	20.7 %	20,720,602	16,431,437	20.5 %	731,096	0.75 %
2009	3,558,069	17.3 %	20,566,871	17,008,802	26.5 %	744,481	2.34 %
2008	2,813,588	14 %	20,097,057	17,283,469	25.9 %	579,644	3.46 %
2007	2,233,944	11.5 %	19,425,597	17,191,653	52.3 %	767,048	3.72 %
2006	1,466,896	7.8 %	18,728,200	17,261,304	43.2 %	442,734	3.28 %
2005	1,024,162	5.6 %	18,132,842	17,108,680	34.1 %	260,454	2.61 %
2004	763,708	4.3 %	17,671,913	16,908,205	29.9 %	175,712	2.12 %
2003	587,997	3.4 %	17,304,339	16,716,342	65.3 %	232,221	1.81 %
2002	355,775	2.1 %	16,997,521	16,641,746	502.4 %	296,717	1.82 %
2001	59,058	0.4 %	16,694,414	16,635,356	98.7 %	29,343	2.08 %
2000	29,715	0.2 %	16,354,050	16,324,335	49.7 %	9,862	2.39 %

Source: Internet Live Stats, “Syria Internet Users,” July 1, 2016, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/syria/>.

Regardless of weak Internet infrastructure, online restrictions, and harsh punishments for online activities against the government, Syrians have made extensive

use of social networks and online tools to document human rights abuses and mobilize protests.²¹⁴ In 2007, roughly two-thirds of Syrian homes have a satellite dish allowing access to foreign TV broadcasts and the first private radio station launched in 2005, which was subsequently censored. The regime prohibited the station from transmitting news or any political content in 2007.²¹⁵ According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in July 2013, the Syrian population was estimated at 22.5 million people, of which 13 million Syrian people used Mobile phones.²¹⁶ As stated by Internet World Stats (2014), that the number of the Internet users in Syria increased by around 5 million users from June 2011 to June 2012.²¹⁷ The Internet live stats give viewers detailed statistics of Syrian population and Internet users between year 2000 and 2016 as illustrated in Table 4. The study shows that the population in Syria at the beginning of the revolution in 2011 was around 20,720,602. The rise of IS caused the population to reduce in 2014 to 18,772,481 which is a drop of 10.3 percent. Meanwhile, during the same period, the Internet users had increased from 4,612,763 to 5,273,190 users that is an increase of 14.3 percent. That means the number of Internet users has increased in spite of the decrease of

²¹⁴ Freedom House, "Syria," May 2015, accessed January 23, 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/FOTN%202015_Syria.pdf.

²¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Syria."

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Internet World Stats, "Internet Usage in the Middle East," March 10, 2014, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>.

the Syrian population. From the population values between 2011 and 2014, the increase of the Internet users is around 25 percent Syrian users of the Internet.²¹⁸

In reality, numbers of Syrian users of social media, whether they are IS followers or other rebel groups, or even ones with the Syrian regime, is very complex to determine in Syria. This is in addition to the lack of a stable connectivity to access the Internet for Syrians. Moreover, most statistics of social media platforms cannot be verified by time because most of them are deleted according to social media platforms policies like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The Syrian civil war has been widely recorded on videos that are often uploaded to YouTube, shared on Facebook, and then tweeted around the world. All the sides in the Syrian conflict use numerous social media accounts.²¹⁹

To differentiate among a follower, a supporter, a hacker, a pre-fighter, a recruiter, or an inductive person while tracking social media platforms is too difficult. Accuracy varies due to the absence of any criterion or reference system. Some social media researchers use buzz terms to detect users, such as terrorist, jihad, IS, Islamic Caliphate, ISIS, how to make a bomb, yet it is not accurate. Identifying the precise image of social media activity on the real situation of an organization's status is difficult.

In February 2014, according to the researcher Derek O'Callaghan at University College Dublin, a study on 600 Twitter and YouTube accounts that posted or link a

²¹⁸ Internet Live Stats, "Syria Internet Users," July 1, 2016, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/syria/>.

²¹⁹ MIT Technology Review, "Social Media Analysis Reveals The Complexities Of Syrian Conflict," February 6, 2014, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/524386/social-media-analysis-reveals-the-complexities-of-syrian-conflict/>.

content related to the Syrian conflict. The accounts categorized 16 distinct communities which formed four aligned groups. The first is jihadists of three communities including accounts associated with AQ. The second is Kurdish group of two communities (political parties and youth organizations). The third is Syrian regime supporters of one community, and the fourth is of 10 communities of moderate opposition groups such as supporters of the FSA. The analysis was run on one community from each group. The most relevant were the following two communities. The community supporting FSA consists of 105 social media accounts including one with 73,000 followers that posts photographs of anonymous bodies so that viewers can identify them. By contrast, accounts of one of the Jihadist communities has tweeted photos that include weaponry attacks, close-ups of fighters, and individuals holding up cut human heads. After analyzing the data, O’Callaghan’s concludes in a logical and reasonable manner that “social media activity in Syria is considerably more convoluted than reported in many other studies of online political activism that find a straight forward polarization effect.”²²⁰

Furthermore, in mid-2015, it is an important issue to highlight on that IS released a statement obliging the cyber coffee shops in its areas of control to “remove Wi-Fi boosters in internet cafes as well as private wireless adapters, even for soldiers of IS.”²²¹ The action is an attempt to limit private Internet access in Raqqa and Deir El- Zoor to

²²⁰ MIT Technology Review, “Social Media Analysis Reveals The Complexities Of Syrian Conflict.”

²²¹ Erika Solomon, “ISIS to cut private internet access in parts of Syria,” *Financial Times*, July 20, 2015, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://on.ft.com/1M4z2ff>.

public locations that might have extremists accessing them in order to restrict reporting by activists as well as GPS-tracking of fighters using the social media platforms.²²² Through cyber war efforts, IS is negatively affected because users can be detected and attacked.

The analysis of the third research sub-question validates the fact that users of social media who followed IS activities increased by the time frame between 2011 and 2014. Moreover, the analysis showed that social media users varied between being fighters, supporters, followers, hackers, recruiters, opponents, or inquisitive persons. This sub-question corroborates that IS's social media capabilities and the targeted Syrian populations guide the research for the primary research question because of the increased numbers of social media users.

Main Research Question

IS leaders used the following tactics to establish the foundation of tacit and explicit support from within the Syrian population: sending representatives to identified groups, focusing on illegal behaviors by Syrian's armed forces, emphasizing the need for an Islamic State, emphasizing the state of victimized prisoners, and connecting those in the subgroup with diverse social media platforms. They also employed social-media tactics that expanded its message.²²³

²²² Al-Arabia, "ISIL is shutting down Internet Cafes around Deirez-Zor Airport," December 8, 2014, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://ara.tv/mhf43>.

²²³ Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter."

The majority of the Syrian rebels in 2011 did not intend to establish any type of religious governance or thought of reestablishing the ancient caliphate. A large number of Syrian rebels were youths, as were shown in relevant videos, who wanted to examine the western way of living that influenced them through all the available media platforms. These youths, however, did not have adequate expertise to determine effective, durable methods to realize their ambitions.²²⁴ The smartphones became their tongues to express, their pens to write their opinions, and their weapons in both ways: to attack their government and the rulers. They also offered the technology of the smart phone as a weapon for others to get its benefits to use and reach the hidden goals, one of which is IS.

Syrian rebels and exiled persecuted Syrians abroad established social media communications to express their ideas, especially their loss of freedom of speech and their regret at having given their submission and loyalty to the Syrian government and especially to President Bashar Assad's rule. These Syrians abroad encouraged those who still lived in Syria to use social media to proceed with their uprising. Meanwhile, every sect of these elite Syrians abroad started building its own dream to returning and becoming the next ruler of Syria. Efforts did not combine into one aim that gave Islamic State militants an opportunity to lead the ground movement in a very professional, well-organized way to move some of the Syrian rebels towards them. The IS militants, in contrast, had a definite vision in mind, with a religious aspect, and a well-developed

²²⁴ Halla Diab, "How the Syrian uprising led to ISIS' rise, not democracy," *Al Arabia English*, October 11, 2014, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/10/11/How-the-Syrian-uprising-led-to-ISIS-rise-not-democracy-Part-1-.html>.

strategy for using newly developed weapons: social media tools as illustrated in Figure 13.



Figure 13. The first weapon of Jihadist

Source: MERM Cyber and Jihad Lab, *From Al-Qaeda To The Islamic State (ISIS), Jihadi Groups Engage in Cyber Jihad: Beginning With 1980s Promotion Of Use Of 'Electronic Technologies' Up To Today's Embrace Of Social Media To Attract A New Jihadi Generation*, December 14, 2016, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://cjlalab.memri.org/lab-projects/tracking-jihadi-terrorist-use-of-social-media/from-al-qaeda-to-the-islamic-state-isis-jihadi-groups-engage-in-cyber-jihad-beginning-with-1980s-promotion-of-use-of-electronic-technologies-up-to-todays-embrace-of-social-media-to-attract-a/>.

Terrorists exploited the chaos and power vacuum when the uprising generated. Terrorists used social media to inflame civil instability and then took advantage of the chaos. Historically, anarchy, disorder, and frustration follow a revolution. In Syria, this enabled AQ branches and arms to spread their power and influence. Juan Zarate, former Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism in U.S.A., in April 2011 predicted that AQ's leaders knew that this was a strategic moment. AQ relied on the

disillusionment and anger that certainly follows revolutions to confirm its eminence in the region.²²⁵

The Arab Spring in Syria produced many radical movements, such as: “Jabhat Ansar al-Islam,” “al-Rahman Legion,” “Army of al-Islam,” “Army of al-Nasr,” and “Army of al-Izzah,” that utilized social media to spread information and promote their agendas. This use of social media affected Syrian users’ opinions and international support, news broadcasting, messaging spread-out, and the ability of the user to communicate and share information within the rebellions. Similarly, regimes and counter-insurgency forces can use social media to accomplish their plans in a technological way. Messaging, information, ideology and narrative are the features of a successful revolution.²²⁶ FBI Director James Comey noted that, through Social media, IS’s propaganda “buzzes in the pockets of troubled souls, unmoored people all across Syria every day.” The FBI and other international agencies are reporting new threats like social media-inspired “crowd-source” terrorism. IS has successfully targeting younger recruits, especially females, to increase their numbers.²²⁷

²²⁵ Sharyl Attkisson, ‘How Arab Spring Opened the Door to Terrorism’s Ugly March,’ *The Daily Signal*, March 12, 2015, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://dailysignal.com/2015/03/12/arab-spring-opened-door-terrorisms-ugly-march/>.

²²⁶ Richard A. Lindsey, “What the Arab Spring Tells Us About the Future of Social Media in Revolutionary Movements,” *Small Wars Journal*, July 29, 2013, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/what-the-arab-spring-tells-us-about-the-future-of-social-media-in-revolutionary-movements>.

²²⁷ Dan Walsh, “As ISIS’ Social Media Tactics Prompt Changes in U.S. Counter-Terror Strategies, We Should Be Educating Our Students,” *Hillars Heintze*, October 20, 2015, accessed January 17, 2017, <http://www.hillardheintze.com/blog/asisis%E2%80%9999-social-media-tactics-prompt-changes-in-us-counter-terror-strategies-we-should-be>.

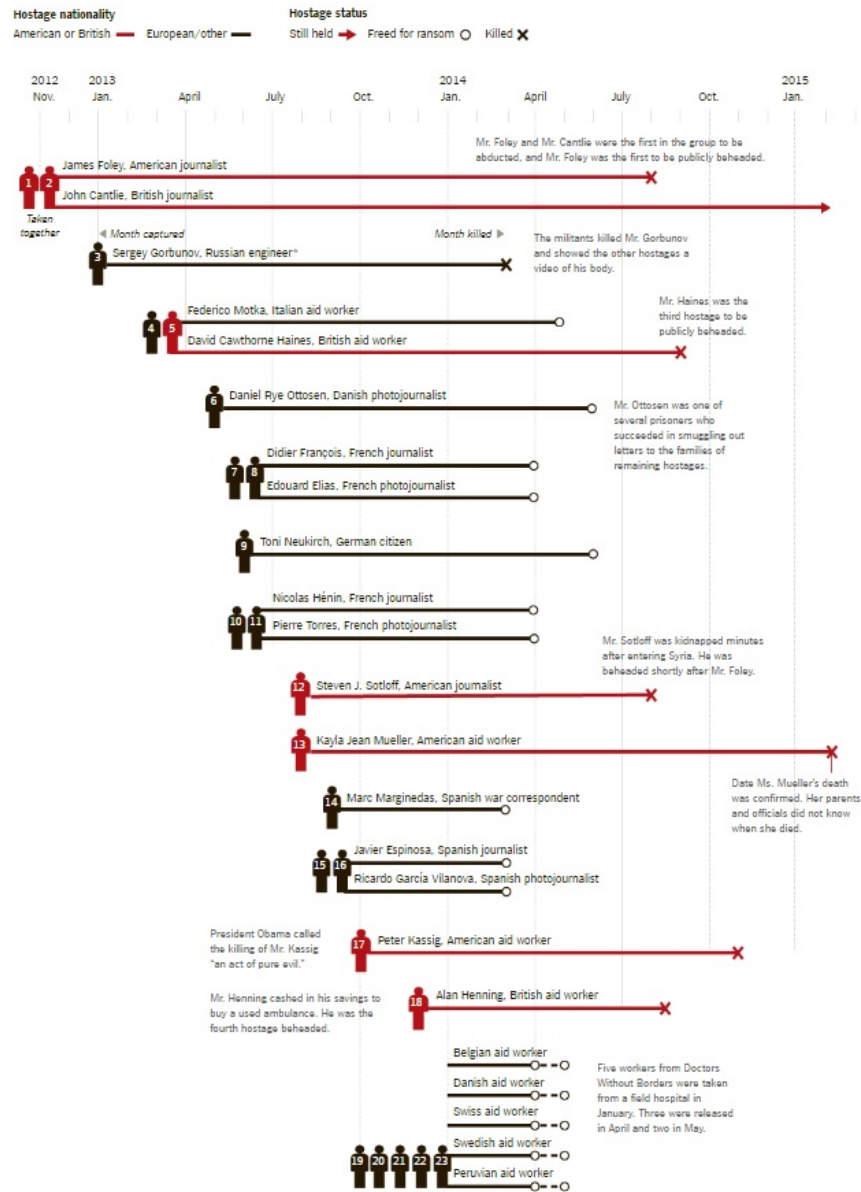


Figure 14. The fates of 23 IS hostages in Syria

Source: Karen Yourish, “The Fates of 23 ISIS Hostages in Syria,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/10/24/world/middleeast/the-fate-of-23-hostages-in-syria.html?module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=Middle%20East&action=keypress®ion=FixedLeft&pgtype=Multi-media>.

IS is notorious for its sophisticated use of social media to achieve its goals. It declares to all Muslims that battling to restore a caliphate is a religious duty. IS portray itself as an agent of change, the true advocate of supreme faith, a leading power of its own perverse notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of other Muslim militias. This narrative suggests that the physical Islamic State is gaining numerical strength and massive power of weapons and money, and that victory is inevitable. The group has employed social media tools to threat and influence opponents and journalists equally not to come to Syria. Figure 14 illustrates the fates of 23 IS's hostages which made Western journalists fear to come to Syria to cover the incidences.²²⁸

IS depict its members both warriors and social service. Images of gore, beheadings, and executions are intended to intimidate opponents, while also recruiting new members. The group has also released images showing foot soldiers eating Snickers chocolate bars and nurturing kittens to show the entertainment life of fighters in their noncombat time on the lands of IS's control. This illustrates a historical reference, as Danish strategic communication expert Thomas Elkjer Nissen has pointed out, to Prophet Muhammad's companion Abu Huraira who was fond of cats. These images aim to deliver the message that IS promotes the welfare of its people, not its murder.²²⁹

²²⁸ Farewell, "The Media Strategy of ISIS."

²²⁹ Ibid.

Table 5. List of “Offences and Punishments” laid out by IS under Sharia Law

Crime	Punishment
Blasphemy against God	Death (beheading or any other form found suitable)
Blasphemy against God’s messenger	Death (beheading), even if the offender repents for his crime
Blasphemy against Islam (religion)	Death
Adultery	If married: stoning to death, If not married: 100 lashes and banishment for a year
Homosexuality	Death for the penetrator and receiver
Theft	Cutting off the hand
Drinking wine (alcohol)	80 lashes
Calumny (slander)	80 lashes
Spying for ‘disbelievers’ (any enemy of IS) interests	Death
Apostasy (abandonment) of Islam	Death
Highway criminality	Killing and taking wealth: Death and crucifixion Killing: death Taking wealth: cut off the right hand and left foot Terrorizing the people: banishment

Source: Oge Okonkwo, “ISIS, terror group lists punishments for different crimes...most are punishable by death,” *Pulse*, September 4, 2015, accessed March 24, 2017, <http://pulse.ng/religion/isis-terror-group-lists-punishments-for-different-crimes-most-are-punishable-by-death-id3641789.html>.

Another image of IS reflected on social media platforms is its call for Sharia rules to punish people. Sharia calls for harsh punishments, such as stoning, amputation or execution. Most Muslim countries do not strictly employ these religious punishments. Furthermore, the United Nations’ report in 2010 estimated thousands of women are killed each year in Sharia-justified “honor killings”: victims murdered for bringing “dishonor” to one’s family. Consequently, IS has become infamous for employing other Sharia

measures (Table 5) such as genital cutting, child marriage, stoning (crime of fornication) and execution by crucifixion (crime of robbers who kill and steal).²³⁰

An examination of how it uses social media and how effective its campaign to recruit, fund, spread message, and create fear that reveals that thousands of men from all over the globe have joined the group as a result of its powerful iconography and seductive online narratives. However, IS also came to the conclusion that it cannot control the narrative the way AQ did. The spreading use of social media, coupled with the availability of smartphones, made individual fighters instant reporters who could film and upload events to the Internet thoughtlessly and recklessly. Other issues that had a negative effect for individual fighters engage in is tweeting about their experiences, sharing pictures of daily life and bragging about their military accomplishments. These men sometimes portray what the leaders of IS would like to have kept hidden. IS, on the other hand, refutes criticism from religious preachers, promotes its narrative, and spreads its image as a compassionate follower of Islam.²³¹

The rebels in Syria were easily led to repeat any slogan, or accept any propaganda. The extreme Syrian Islamists found an opportunity to manipulate the various sects of the Syrian Sunnis as well as foreign Muslims to take revenge on the Syrian government, which blocked their freedom of speech and made them keep silent to survive. The Islamists believe that Islamic rule is the blessed destiny for all social,

²³⁰ Attkisson, "How Arab Spring Opened the Door to Terrorism's Ugly March."

²³¹ Ian Black et al., "The terrifying rise of Isis: \$2bn in loot, online killings and an army on the run," *The Guardian*, June 16, 2014, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/16/terrifying-rise-of-isis-iraq-executions>.

political, and economic domains in a nation. The ideology of “Salafi Ansar al-Sharia” (AAS) of the Muslim Rule,²³² which calls for Islamic sharia law to establish aligns with IS’s ideology.

Before the Syrian uprising, the Sunni-Shiite divide was not a subject for preachers to discuss in Mosques or on TV shows like those of TV performer Amr Khaled, and the Muslim Brotherhood advocate Tareq Mohammad al-Suwaidan to name a few. Their topic had been just a general Islam discussion, yet their shows formed an Islamic base for youths in the Arab countries, such as Syria. The violence of the Syrian uprising transformed Islamist speech from an uprising of the Syrian people to an uprising of Sunnis to fight the Syrian “Alawite” regime. IS posted photos and videos of the Syrian regime, especially the online videos that showed Syrian armed forces arresting Syrian Sunni fighters to say “la Illaha illa Bashar al-Assad” (no God except Bashar al-Assad).²³³ Also, the Syrian men obliged to pray on the Syrian President's photos; that fueled the Sunni-Shiite division in most of the Arab countries, especially Syria that was shown in the increased number of protests. That has encouraged the extreme Islamic Syrian Sunnis to join IS in Syria.²³⁴ In addition, using social media platforms, IS highlighted the assistance Syrian regime got from Iran and the Shiite militant groups from Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Iraq.²³⁵

²³² “Salafi Ansar al-Sharia” means “the Salafist followers of Sharia.”

²³³ Diab, “How the Syrian uprising led to ISIS’ rise, not democracy.”

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Halla Diab, “How Syria's uprising blurred moderate, extremist lines,” *Al Arabia English*, October 12, 2014, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya>.

By 2012, the extreme Islamist groups were using social media tools to build coalitions with other Islamist factions in Syria. Some of the Islamist Syrians who hated the regime and the Alawi –Shiite connection made them join IS; it was shown on the issued slogans against that connection. The slogans changed from yelling “silmeyyah silmiyyah” (peaceful, peaceful) to “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great) with bearded rebel fighters posting their brutal videos of the executions of the Syrian soldiers on YouTube and Facebook. Actually, all Muslims respect and follow the slogan of “Allahu Akbar” because it is one of the basics in believing in God. Yet, the slogan influences all Muslims to trust in God and follow his rules and sharia.

Extremists have posted on social media their brutal actions with the yelling of religious slogans to convince the viewers that they are accomplishing the Islamic Sharia, of which it is a wrong image of Islam when an extremist removed the heart of a Syrian soldier that was the turning point of extremists to be terrorists. The majority of IS’s leaders kept silent on this video as an approval for the action. The spread of this video went global and was covered by most international media channels. In April 2013, the AQ affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra established a sharia council and enforced the Islamic law in Aleppo, and later, in Raqqa and Deir al-Zour. These activities made the Syrian population link between what they are watching on social media platforms and what could be established in their communities’ councils yelling for sharia.

At nearly the same time, Turkey’s borders with Syria were intentionally opened for jihadists to enter Syria. Through social media encouraged extreme Islamists to come

net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/10/12/How-the-Syrian-uprising-led-to-ISIS-rise-not-democracy-Part-2-.html.

and fight against the Syrian regime and also to help build an Islamic state in Syria. Some clerics, like the Saudi Mohammed al-Arifi, called for jihad in Syria. Al-Arifi action paved the way for some legitimacy of jihad in Syria that helped IS get more fighters from abroad, and within Syria. The Islamic rebels in Syria moved from one militia to another by time in a way to achieve their goal by changing the Syrian regime. This gives a good example of the social media messages of different groups; and how their propaganda influenced the viewers. The nomadic nature of rebels suggests that social media is an effective tool.

Summary

This chapter has reported the findings of the present study and discussed these findings in light of similar evidence in the body of literature. The three research sub-questions guided the primary research question by detecting IS social media capabilities and determining the targeted Syrian populations to accomplish its planned tasks between 2011 and 2014 by radicalizing the Syrian protestors of the Arab Spring in 2011 and created grounds of support from some of the Syrians to rise among other extreme terrorist groups acting in Syria that had vision and long-term goal of establishing the Islamic Caliphate. Social media platforms acted as a good means for IS to facilitate its capabilities to spread its message and ideology, show ability to govern its controlled areas, and expand its propaganda worldwide in a very rapid way and in a short time. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of the present study, make several conclusions, point out the limitations, list contributions, discuss pedagogical implications and finally propose several recommendations for further investigation and research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

Social media plays an important role in many communities, where the use of these sites is not limited to younger members of the community, but extends to their elders. Moreover, these sites have played an important role in the process of democratic transformation in many Arab countries. This was reflected clearly in the Arab Spring revolutions that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, where the primary means of the coordinating action was the young people activities on social media. The increased use of social media to mobilize support has led to its use by many of the terrorist organizations, IS in particular. This was reflected clearly in the recruiting of many young people to its organization through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The protesters in Syrian, including many Syrian rebels desired democracy and freedom of speech, as well as social and economic improvement. However, the turmoil surrounding the uprising allowed for the rise of IS, and the rise of the Islamic Caliphate, a terrorist organization that used social media platforms. Typically social media is intended to share ideas, wishes, and love between people through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social networks. Instead, IS used social media as a tool to share brutality, hatred, and its ideology globally.

The vision of the leaders of the IS is that it survives and expands. A way to achieve those goals is the effective use of social media. IS uses the Internet and social media for propaganda, and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, and communications and operational tool for planning, coordinating, and executing attacks. It is used also as

spread fighter weapons' characteristics information and technical knowledge for manufacturing explosives.

It is clear that IS wants to share its actions and views in public, and propaganda. International media institutions indirectly helped IS to rise, by highlighting its videos, speeches, publications, and its flawed concept of Islam as an ideology. Many people, especially in the Middle East, are drawn to watch its videos, irrespective of the brutality and violence after the international media reports about a certain publication. IS's strategy is based on the use of physical force and a commonly believed frame of ideas: ideology. Based on the analysis of IS's social media use, ideology is a powerful stimulator behind IS's formation and establishment. Ideology, when coupled with armed forces, makes IS believe that its dream of a caliphate may come true.

Conclusions

After the Arab Spring started in Syria, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were central tools for the protests. IS successfully used social media platforms to attract multiple segments of the Syrian population; first the extreme Syrian Islamists, who share the same religious ideology. Then, the youth and poor people were influenced by different motives, whether financial, psychological or moral or ideological, or to fight against the Shia and Alawi who support the Syrian government to join IS. Lastly this is in addition to the armed people of other rebel groups that are "ready soldiers" to fight under IS flag. Not only young people joined IS, but also mature men and women. This was reflected clearly through Facebook and Twitter accounts created by women that belong to this organization. These women sought to communicate with females all over the world, and encourage them to join IS in Syria. Some Syrians joined

the organization although of its terroristic ideology. On one hand, IS changed the peaceful Syrian Arab Spring into a bloody terroristic civil war. On the other hand, it affected indirectly the whole world by spreading fear and terror through attacks here and there.

The analysis showed that IS uses social media platforms in more than one language, for example, Arabic, English, French, and German. It also uses quotes from the holy book Qur'an, to influence the greatest number of individuals. It clarifies the power of the organization through broadcasting its field of operations. In addition, IS followers showed that they enjoyed the life in the area IS controls, which made many Syrian youths want to experience it as well. On the other side, IS publishes many of the videos on YouTube, that show its use of violence and brutality. The strange thing is that in spite of this brutality, many young people join IS after viewing these brutal videos, which may appeal to their desire for authority in spite of their conscience.

What is distinct about IS is the way that it merges traditional media broadcasting like television, radio, and jihad web forums, with pop cultural platforms, such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, to intensify its message. IS's use of Twitter is particularly remarkable, because it has become the primary means of media propagation; its online publications are public and characterized in its efficient, controlled, and decentralized plan. Twitter allows IS to reach its audience very rapidly, within seconds, which makes the relation between IS leaders and followers closer and in real time. Tweeting and retweeting is a simple procedure to interact and spread the posts. This tactic of IS convinces the followers that they are part of the decision-making for establishing the Caliphate and provoke them to join physically.

Social media companies, like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, have adjusted their regulations to block the accounts related to IS that shows brutal content substances. However, because of the decentralized social media tactics of IS, it is difficult to control the suppression of the material issued. IS's social media users are able to create new accounts rapidly and with ease. This contributes to a partial failure of social media companies' strategy to stop IS on the Internet. IS has the ability to spread false information and hack others' sites and pages with ease through the Internet. IS's social media users formed well organized and methodical networks through which social media followers access and distribute IS publications, like "Dabiq," and synchronize posts and hashtags.

Through social media posts and IS publications, IS has shown a long-term strategy, which is the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate. IS finds the use of brutality and bloody scenes in Syria against the regime or innocent populations who refer to other religions, a necessary means to reach the desired end of establishing the Caliphate. In Syria, IS ran many features to sustain the area it controlled through social media platforms. For example, it launched public services including medical aids, education, local and religious security services (sharia courts), and infrastructure projects. It made the Syrians in those areas dependent on IS to get the required resources to live. This encouraged some of them to join IS to get more money on one hand, and to submit to the authority of IS on the other hand.

Validation of Research Assumptions

The present research had two assumptions which helped in narrowing the focus of the study. The first assumption was too essential to study, since it assumes that social

media played an important role in the metamorphosis of IS in Syria between 2011 and 2014. After answering the subquestions and the primary question of the research, and upon analyzing the extracted outputs, all concluded data validates and matches the assumption which turned into fact upon relying on modern social media theories and frameworks to build organizational social media strategy to publicize its products, spread out its messages, and maximize its reach to its consumers. IS was a very fit organization to such strategy.

In return to the second assumption related to the relation between IS and JN, and the fact that JN was a subordinate to ISI during the period of the study, the subject matter may confuse some researchers to identify who of them is doing what, and for the sake of whom. But throughout the research, this study focused mainly on IS to show its actions on social media and its relative effectiveness to show that the first assumption turned into fact. The researcher kept the second assumption throughout the research to make it suitable for future research studies.

Research Questions Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the three research sub-questions was revealed by the smooth flow of information to answer the primary research question. It was based on a scientific framework to analyze the relevant collected data throughout the research and backed up with significant pieces of evidence. The use of Domino Effect Theory showed that the research questions answered seamlessly the Domino Effect questions in developing social media strategy without any gap. Another evidence of research questions effectiveness is that the indexing or coding used to answer the guiding sub-questions and the primary research question formulated acceptable themes that were mapped and interpreted in a

suitable narrative form that verified the importance of the study, and gave creditability to the results.

Recommendations

As a result, because IS succeeded in influencing some of the Syrian population and other young people from other countries to join it through social media, whether on Facebook or Twitter or even YouTube, this study recommends the following:

Syrian Population

Syrians must unite and stand together against all extremist groups. Syrians must encourage a return to their diversity and the acceptance of other partners in the country from other sects and religions. They should think deeply of what these groups made in their country. All terrorists' social media platforms must be blocked in Syria. Syrian must launch counter social media activities to show the IS followers illusions and the psychological traps of their ideology. When there is a will, there is a way to come back and let Syria rise and thrive in the hope for a better opportunity, more tolerance, and a promising future. Jihadists must view social media posts defining the real meaning of "Jihad" as what Islam religion instructed and the Prophet Muhammad called for in the forgiveness and respect of others.

Muslim Communities

Muslim voices who represent the real Islam should be enabled to reach young Muslims in each country who are vulnerable to radical extremism through social media platforms. Starting from the Syrian population, Middle Eastern, and Western countries, Muslims must post on-line what Islam really calls for and how these groups are shifting

the religious concepts to match their goals. It must be simple and easy to understand. Arab countries must set a distinctive counter social media strategy to fight terrorism of extremists. They must take actions rather than wait for the West to solve their problems.

International Communities

Military campaigns striking IS without targeting the extremist ideology posted on the internet of terrorist communities are not enough. Without defeating the extreme ideology now will lead to new IS in a coming couple of years. This extreme ideology must be changed to a moderate one, reinforced by education over all its platforms, backed up with scholars' efforts, and de-radicalization through on-line programs. Western democracy cannot be set easily for communities who have not experience it before. The only solution for the Syrian crisis is the political one. Power nations such as U.S.A., United Kingdom, and France must set this solution to save the soul of the Syrian people. Power nations must encourage some neighboring countries to cut internet facilities on terrorists, cut off arms, and funding to extremists. Scholars and moderate organizations' minds and pens can resolve the radical ideologies by their posts and tweets, not by weapons and missiles. Stability will allow Syrians to think about what is suitable for them to set the true meaning of Democracy. Offering them a good chance of a decent life that will show them how IS example was weird for living and practice. Democracy is the enemy of extremists; it ruins their ideology in spreading their message and expands their territories.

Countries must work to fight this terrorist organization in all ways. The focus must be in the fight against intellectual, media, and technological mediums of IS to stop the recruitment of many individuals to this organization. These recruitments resulted

from delusions and wrong beliefs of jihad, and the concept of Syria and Iraq are the land of the Caliphate, which convinced them that in order to go to heaven, you must fight the infidels and apostates. This contradicts with the Islamic instructions and dogmas.

Countries must work to fight IS through social media platforms too. Some countries have already begun to do so, as they closed many of IS pages. In addition, they deleted the brutal and violent videos the organization published to provoke horror to the community. Also, the recruiting videos that were posted to attract many young people to the idea of a Caliphate should be obstructed or stopped.

Schools and Universities

Schools and universities, mainly in the middle east, must use social media platforms to set educational programs to warn students from the terrorist groups' misleading online propaganda and recruitment strategies. That will decrease the online threat of IS on the youths. Schools and universities must launch anti-IS social media messages and videos that can be shared with educational institutions and local media. By doing that, the number of social media intelligence experts will increase in communities to fight terrorism electronically.

Social media Companies

Social media companies must update their policies against terrorism and brutality scenes, and coordinate with governments to infiltrate and abolish the SMN (real and virtual) behind IS's social media campaign. By detecting and targeting IS followers Twitter accounts individually, social media companies might be able to break IS's global

social media campaign. It is a difficult mission for social media companies to accomplish, but it is necessary to shut the door on IS social media campaign.

Finally, IS always work to achieve its end state goals, in terms of the availability of land, the people, and the recognition of the Islamic Caliphate worldwide. Countries must fight the spread of violence and terror on the land, and IS always works to distort the image of Islam and through the wrong beliefs and ideas about Islam, and to convince people that this is what God wants, so that they get the paradise. Therefore, IS's ideas must be fought on social media, and all Muslims must not hesitate to fight it and not to fall in its trap name: IS, because it does not tie to Islam in any way, and Islam is innocent of it.

Suggestions for Future Studies

At the beginning of this project, the goal was to conduct a narrative study analysis using the methodology illustrated in chapter 3. Because of the depth of the methodology and the wealth of information available in IS social media capabilities in Syria, this rapidly exceeded the limitations of this thesis for the interpretation and analysis of a large amount of data. The methodology is nonetheless sound and would benefit from further testing against the social media usage that ties the terrorist groups found in Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Egypt, and Libya to name a few and the lone wolves found all over the world. These are people who are ready to explode themselves among innocent people, and the trigger is set by a tweet on social media.

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